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*HITROVO WOULD CLAIM HER, AND AWAY THEY WOULD GO, GLIDING THROUGH THE MYSTERIOUS SEMI-TWILIGHT.*—[See p. 160.]

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# WOLFENBERG

A Novel

BY

WILLIAM BLACK
AUTHOR OF
"DONALD ROSS OF HEIMRA" "A PRINCESS OF THULE"
"STAND FAST, CRAIG-ROYSTON" ETC.

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'*Of Poseidon, the mighty God, I begin my lay, Poseidon who shakes the earth and the sea unharvested, God of the deep, who possesses Helicon and wide Aegae. A double honor have the Gods given thee, oh Earthshaker, to be at once the tamer of steeds and the saviour of ships. Then hail, Poseidon, the girdler of the world, the dark-haired deity; and do thou, oh Blessed One, keep a kindly heart, and succor seafaring men.*'—A. L.

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# WOLFENBERG

## CHAPTER I

### FORTUITOUS ATOMS

WHAT is the space, then, that lies between comedy and tragedy? In this instance, it was merely the breadth of a table in the saloon of the Orient s.s. *Orotania.* For here were we, the most careless and irresponsible set of creatures that were ever shaken into seats by the dice-box of Fate (the Purser); and there were they— But let us begin at the beginning.

We first noticed them as they were crossing the pier at Tilbury, on their way to the tender. There was an elderly lady, sallow of face, with silver-white hair beautifully braided. There was her daughter, a young woman of about five-and-twenty, of a pale and clear complexion, with dark and lustrous eyes, highly-arched black eyebrows, and magnificently-massed black hair. Then there was a man apparently about forty-five, of middle height or something thereunder, with a long brown moustache, a clipped brown beard, and a firm and decided mouth that seemed somehow out of keeping with his large, gray, dreamy eyes. Indeed, he wore something of an absent look; it was his two companions who were most alert and interested, especially the younger lady, who was talking and laughing with a gay vivacity.

"Peggy," observed a certain small creature who keeps her own and certain other households in meek subjection—though now she spoke with bated breath—"those two are countrywomen of yours."

"I think you forget which is my country," replied Lady Cameron of Inverfask, a little proudly. "But they are Americans, if that is what you mean."

The next moment—the new arrivals were now coming along the gangway—a startling *thing* occurred. The man's face ap-

peared to undergo a gradual and yet swift transformation. Or was it not rather that this definite and actual, this living and breathing, physiognomy summoned up all sorts of ghosts—outlined portraits in the illustrated papers—perhaps, even, some likeness in oil in this or that exhibition? One had certainly seen those features before—in books, or magazines, or weekly journals. Then a hasty and furtive appeal to the printed list of passengers, and the mystery was solved at once: this was no other than Wolfenberg, the great American artist—the most imaginative painter that America has yet produced—the painter of dreams and visions, of phantasms and mysteries—the painter of "The Return of Undine," of "Two Lovers in a Valley in the Moon," of "The Goddess Athene Entering the Chamber of Nausicaa." Our souls rejoiced over the discovery: it was something even to be sailing in the same vessel with this master of the magic wand, this compeller of clouds and tempests, this traveller who had been through the spirit-worlds, whose eyes had beheld strange things.

And when our good fortune (or the Purser) so arranged affairs that we found ourselves seated opposite these three in the saloon of the great steamer, an acquaintanceship was struck up at once: that is easily managed on board ship; the passing of a salt-cellar will suffice. Of course it was the young lady who at the outset demanded most attention, and seemed to expect it, and got it. For one thing, there was no unnecessary shyness about her; she was eagerly interested in everything around her; she chatted freely, smiling and showing pretty teeth, sometimes laughing merrily with her lustrous black eyes. Moreover, she was pleasant to look at. If she was not strictly beautiful, there was at least something curiously seductive in her appearance—something striking, too, in the contrast between the magnificent black hair and the pale skin and red lips. Perhaps that unusually bright crimson owed a little to artifice, or was it merely accentuated by the prevailing pallor of her complexion? At all events, her pallor was not the pallor of an invalid. There was not much of the invalid about Amélie Dumaresq, as we subsequently discovered her name to be. To us, who were no further away from her than the breadth of the table, she seemed literally to thrill to the finger-tips with life, and with the delight of life. It would have been an almost aggressive vitality had it not been modified by the young lady's evident and placid expectation that she should be

listened to, and petted, and made much of. And how patiently her two companions bore with her wilfulness, and her blunt, frank speeches, and her petulant paradoxes! Sometimes, it is true, a cloud came over Wolfenberg's thoughtful and rather tired-looking face; it was as if he would have said, 'Amélie, have a little moderation, before strangers.' But ever and always he skilfully interposed, apologizing for her, defending her, explaining that, after all, there was something in what she maintained. His devotion to her, his gentle government of her, his pride in her even when she was most audacious, were all beautiful to witness. So that we congratulated ourselves on this our setting-out. There was one table, at least, in the big saloon that promised to be anything but dull.

We lost sight of them after luncheon, for each and all of us went our several ways to arrange cabins, and open trunks, and make preparations for the long seven weeks' voyage. When we saw them again on deck, the day was dying out in crimson flame, with Dover Castle looming large and high and dark against the west; while along the south-eastern horizon lay one massive cloud, vast, portentous, suffused with a sultry light, and dwarfing into insignificance the pale golden-white line of the French coast immediately underneath it. Then by and by the tinkle of the steward's bell was heard all over the ship; and presently we were once more seated opposite our newly found acquaintances—down here in the saloon, that was now all bravely aglow with the electric lamps.

She took away the breath from us in about the very first second.

"I have got one detestable duty done with this afternoon," said she, addressing herself mostly to the two ladies opposite her. "I thought, as we were going to Greece, I ought to read the Iliad; and I've been struggling with it for days; and, thank goodness, I've finished it at last!"

"Yes?" said our Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with kind inquiry.

"You want to know what I think of it?" said this young person, the contour of whose satin-soft cheek and the liquid splendor of whose dark eyes would not have led one to anticipate the ruthless iconoclasm of her mind—"I think it is absolute trash. I always suspected that Homer was rubbish, and now I know it. And I'll tell you how I suspected it: it was because whenever you found any one writing about Homer and his knowledge of human nature, *the one thing that* was always dragged in was the

parting of Hector and Andromache; and I formed a kind of notion that it was the only bit of human nature in the whole book —the only sample they could show. The Iliad?—it seems to me nothing but the doings and sayings of a lot of great, brawling, boasting prize-fighters. The only human beings in it are the immortals—and they are a parcel of big babies."

And so she went on; but one of us seemed to hear no more—seemed rather to be recalling a picture that appeared in the Salon some ten or a dozen years ago. The title of it was, 'Achilles invoking the aid of Thetis;' the subject was the grief-laden hero down by the sea-shore, stretching out his hands, and imploring his goddess-mother beneath the waves to hear him. This is the passage, according to a recent version: 'So spake he, weeping, and his lady mother heard him as she sat in the sea-depths beside her aged sire. With speed arose she from the gray sea, like a mist, and sat her before the face of her weeping son, and stroked him with her hand, and spake and called on his name.' Now, that picture was signed 'Ernest Wolfenberg;' and all the artistic circles of Europe were talking of the young American painter who had so boldly carried modern methods, and the dreams of his own high-strung imagination, into the region of classic myth. And did this girl—whom he seemed absolutely to worship—did she alone forget? Or did she consider (which is a more charitable view) that his position as a painter was so assured, and his choice of subject so unerring and indisputable, that anything she might say about either art or literature was not of much consequence, so far as their personal relations were concerned? None the less did he now come to her aid—tried to show that there was something to be said for her opinion, and urged the unavoidable poverty of translations. It was pathetic in its way. One wondered if it were possible that she had never even heard of 'Achilles invoking the aid of Thetis.'

That night we went placidly down Channel, trying at times to identify the distant streaks of dull yellow fire with one or other of the Sussex watering-places. It was a moonlight night, calm and still; a broad band of silver quivered on the smoothly undulating sea; the throbbing of the engines became a pleasant, monotonous, drowsy murmur in the silence. At intervals, it is true, we had music on deck; but some of us may have preferred the spaces of quiet; at all events, Peggy—that is to say, Lady Came-

ron of Inverfask—and her two friends had sought out for themselves a secluded corner aft of the wheel-box; and there whosoever chose could discourse of their shipmates freely. It was of the painter Wolfenberg and of Amélie Dumaresq that one had now to hear.

"Why," said Peggy, after some random observations, "she cannot be more than four or five-and-twenty; and he is getting quite gray!"

"These," responded Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with decision, "are the matches that turn out best—if it is lasting kindness and care that the girl wants."

"She does not seem as devoted to him as he is devoted to her," Peggy went on, in the absent way that is induced when one has a great waste of moonlit water to rest one's eyes on. "But of course she could not show it, especially before strangers. She calls him Ernest, however, and he calls her Amélie, so that it is no ordinary friendship. I wonder, now, if she will marry him for his reputation, his position? Mind you, she has a pretty fair notion of her own importance; don't you think so? She has her own individuality. I doubt whether she would easily take a subordinate place. . . . What exquisite hands she has!"

"And she is aware of it," answered the other, calmly.

"And a very pretty smile—very winning, I think. And a merry laugh, too. Why, she laughs with the laugh of a child!"

"And yet she is an absolute virago in her opinions!" exclaimed the smaller woman, with a touch of amazement. "She is a regular down-with-everythingist, wherever tradition or custom or conventionality is concerned."

"At all events," Peggy put in, "she respects custom quite sufficiently in her costume. Both she and her mother are perfectly dressed."

"Peggy, my dear child, anarchical women are never anarchical in their dress—unless through lack of means. And Miss Dumaresq and her mother have just come over from Paris. Didn't you hear? She has been studying in the Atelier Didron, so Mr. Wolfenberg says."

"The girl, you mean?"

"Yes; and she has brought a lot of unfinished work with her. Perhaps, when we become better friends, she may let us have a peep. I confess I *am curious*—for more than one reason."

And so they talked, and further talked, and speculated, over a subject that seemed to have some mysterious attraction for them; until it was time for us to say good-night and go away to our respective cabins, with one final glance round at the magic world of dark blue-gray and silver-shimmering sea.

Next morning we had a look in at Plymouth; and, just before starting again, Peggy happened to be leaning idly with her arms on the rail, gazing across the green waters of the harbor towards the fair-shining town and its heights and fortifications, when our miniature Admiral-in-chief came up, her air and manner betokening serious matters.

"Peggy," said she, "in a few minutes we shall be off for Morocco."

"I hope we sha'n't be bound there," says the young lady, under her breath, to her other companion.

"You *are* bound there," is the natural reply.

"What are you two whispering about? But I wish to say something to you, and you must pay attention, you American girl," that small mite goes on, undaunted. "I wish to say this: We are now leaving England on a long voyage. You must not pretend to forget that your husband distinctly placed you under my charge when he went to India, and gave me authority over you. And it is my duty to see that you behave yourself, and show yourself worthy of the name you bear and of the country you have adopted. And, mind you, I know what a grass-widow is. I know why she is called a grass-widow: it is because she is a creature that goes about gobbling up all green things—especially young men. Now, there is to be nothing of the kind on this ship. I will not have it. I am responsible for you. And look at the risk I run. Listen to this notice." She opened a paper she held in her hand, and proceeded: "'Any passenger who may take on board any article of explosive, inflammable, dangerous, or damaging nature is liable to prosecution and to the penalties imposed by Statute, and also for all damages resulting from the shipment of such article.' Clearly that clause refers to you; and yet here are we rendering ourselves liable, unless you will pledge yourself to good behavior."

"Aren't you going to say something for me?" murmurs Peggy, aside. "I always stick up for you when I get a chance."

To which this is the answer:

"I have already and frequently pointed out to you that there are only two absolutely perfect human beings in the world. Now, perfection provokes envy. And envy is the mother of suspicion and malice. But when these two beings, mutually rejoicing in the consciousness of their exalted innocence, and strong in the bonds of an understanding and a sympathy that time, and fate, and traitorous tongues seem unable to destroy—"

"And particularly in this case," says Peggy, with a deeply injured air, "when my sister Emily is going to join us at Palermo! Oh, much fun I shall have after Emily has come on board! You have never seen my sister; you don't know. I tell you we shall all have to live up to very solemn and lofty ideals when she comes along. You needn't be afraid, Missis. There won't be any skylarking, either with young men or old. Why, I used to be mortally afraid of her when she came home from school. I knew I was a frivolous person; but I did what I could to earn her approval—at least, by concealing things—a little hypocrisy—oh, Emily believes in me—"

"Very well, then," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, apparently only half convinced by these protestations. "We shall see. I will keep my eye on you, my super-innocent young friend. I've seen grass-widows before, and their ways, especially on moonlight nights in the Mediterranean—"

But here the Microscopic Calumniator had to cease, for the men were about to haul up the accommodation-ladder, and she found it necessary to move further aft.

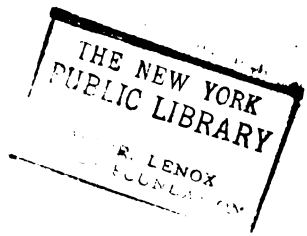
This was a Sunday; so that our amusements and occupations were of a subdued and sober character. It was not until the following day, when we were well into the Bay of Biscay, that we all of us seemed to settle down into the ordinary swing of life on board ship. And it must be said that the dreaded Bay treated our apprehensive women-folk in the civillest fashion. All day long there were only these familiar features: a cloudless sky, a horizon of milky white, a circle of lapping, dark-blue water, with a blinding, bewildering shiver of diamonds towards the sun. In the afternoon, amid the other games going forward, cricket was proposed; and when the netting had been fixed up all round, and sides chosen, there speedily came together a little crowd of fair spectators, who, perched *high* on one of the after skylights, and *forming a gallery, as it were,* could award applause or laughter

as the case demanded. You may be sure that Peggy was in that group, a conspicuous figure. And one marked and beautiful thing was this: under the wide-spread awning she was, of course, in shadow, so that all the light that shone on her features was reflected upward from the flashing and glancing sea, and that made a sort of glory of her face. When one looked at her—at the braided golden-brown hair, the wholesome, countrified complexion, the shining eyes, the smiling mouth, the bland and yet quick interest of her expression—what did one care about this mad game except to see whether she laughed or clapped her hands in approval? These poor flannelled wretches, toiling in the hot afternoon sun—with their "Played, sir!" "Well caught!" "How's that?"—they were doing their best, no doubt, and the scrimmage had its varying fortunes; but here, overlooking all, was this radiant creature, complaisant, serene, beatific, the Queen of the Tournament. And already she seemed to have made friends with everybody round about her.

After dinner that night an impromptu dance was got up when the deck-chairs had been cleared away. It was somehow a strange kind of spectacle, and yet picturesque in its bizarre fashion: the dull glow of the lamps around the red-jacketed bandsmen—the electric globes further aft revealing the awning overhead—the swift-revolving figures; the young women in light silks and cashmeres; here and there an officer in uniform; and then beyond all that the great world of waves, blue-black, smooth-heaving, with the broad pathway of the moon trembling in vivid silver. This also was curious: in an ordinary ballroom, when there is a pause in the music—a dotted note, for example, in a waltz—that momentary space of quiet is filled with the rustle of silk and muslin and slippers; but here, in these slight intervals, one caught another sound—the continuous swish of the water along the side of the ship. Wolfenberg was standing with us, looking on in his usual preoccupied, contemplative fashion.

"Isn't it very monstrous and abominable," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit to him, "that those people should destroy such a beautiful night with their scamperings? But, after all, there were wild revels in 'a wood near Athens.' And it is rather pretty, don't you think so?—the different lights—the figures—the sea. What do you say, Mr. Wolfenberg, could an Impressionist make some*thing out of it?*"

"*AND IT IS RATHER PRETTY*, DON'T YOU THINK SO?—THE DIFFERENT *LIGHTS*—THE FIGURES—THE SEA."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"Oh, there is a subject in it," he answered her, "for any one audacious enough. I could not manage it. But Miss Dumaresq might."

She was startled, and no wonder, to hear this master of his art talk so about a girl who had just been a pupil in the Atelier Didron. But he proceeded—for whenever he spoke of Amélie Dumaresq he seemed to rouse himself from his reveries—"You must see her work. You will be surprised, I think. She has the courage of a man, and the strength of a man. It is the truth she aims at, the truth without compromise. You cannot understand her until you have seen her work. You have met her only in frivolous moments—and no doubt she likes to be petted."

At this moment the music ceased, and the dance came to an end.

"Miss Dumaresq is in the saloon at present, writing letters," said he, with a sudden inspiration. "Suppose we go down now, and I will ask her to bring you some of her things?"

Well, we were nothing loath; for by and by the music would be resumed; and there seemed something a little too incongruous between the silences of the great deep all around us and these strains of cornet and violin and violoncello. Besides, one naturally wished to see studies that had won commendation from so high an authority. So the four of us went along and passed down the companion-way: Miss Dumaresq we found at one of the tables, while her mother was seated at no great distance, reading.

"Amélie," said he, very gently, "may I disturb you?"

"I am delighted," said she; and at once she shut her writing-desk.

"Will you do me a favor?" he asked—and the soft black eyes answered him with a glance of obvious pleasure. "I have been talking about your work, and I want to justify myself. I want you to go and bring some of your drawings to show to our friends here."

But at this she drew back, in affected alarm.

"Oh! no, no, no!" she exclaimed. "No, I cannot, Ernest—some other time, perhaps—in daylight."

"I mean only the black and white," he pleaded.

"Oh no," said she. "No—I could not—you have taken me by surprise—*I am frightened.*"

"Come, be yourself, Amélie!" he said, with a touch of reproach in his tone, for clearly her dismay was in large measure simulated.

But she would not yield. She obstinately maintained that she was terrified out of her wits; she wanted time to prepare herself for such an ordeal; perhaps next day she would have mustered up courage. And of course Mrs. Threepenny-bit—not minding whether this excessive shyness were genuine or not—took the girl's part, and declared that she must be left free to choose her own time, and apologized for the suggestion having been made. But Amélie Dumaresq's eyes were fixed on Wolfenberg.

"Ah, I see I have offended you, Ernest," she said. "Oh, yes, yes, I can see—you need not protest. What can I do? I know."

She went quickly to the piano, sat down, and let her fingers run through a little prelude. She turned and looked at him, and smiled. Then she began to sing—well, it could hardly be called singing, for she had next to nothing of a voice; but she had a pretty and coquettish grace of expression. The air was unknown to us; the words, as we afterwards learned, were a translation from the Spanish.

*'Cupid, drop, oh drop that dart!*
*Do not aim it at my heart;*
*For I'm but a little maid,*
*And of you I'm so afraid!'*

Yes, it was pretty and fascinating enough, if it was no great vocal triumph; and at least we could hear distinctly what she had to say. So she went on:

*'I've heard how your pranks of yore*
*Kept Olympus in uproar;*
*And how all the goddesses*
*Yielded to your sweet decrees;*
*Since celestials thus you sway,*
*Is it any wonder, pray,*
*That of you I'm so afraid,*
*I, a little mortal maid?*

*'I'm too young, of that I'm sure,*
*And too simple, to endure*
*Your enchantments and your errors,*
*Your deceptions and your terrors,*
*Your soft languishing desires,*
*Your consuming passion fires.*

*Out of reach and sight of man*
*I will keep me (if I can!);*
*For I'm but a little maid,*
*And of love I'm so afraid!'*

She came away from the piano with a laugh.

"Well, Mr. Gloomy Brows, am I forgiven?"

"Amélie," said he, quite good-naturedly, "how long are you going to remain a child? You forget that you are a great artist."

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## CHAPTER II

### TWO DISCOVERIES

Again has the mother of dawn, rosy-fingered morning, aroused the sleeping world; and over there are the phantom hills of Spain —mere films along the eastern horizon. Yet of all the passengers on board this big steamer only two have so far appeared on deck; and these have perched themselves high on the wheel-box, to be out of the way of the hose. One of these is a tall American young lady; and her eyes, which at all times are eloquent and expressive enough, are at this moment full of an eager interest.

"I am so glad of the chance," she says, "for I have a tremendous secret to tell you. Oh, you would never guess—not if you were to work at it for a month. Do you know who is on board this ship? Why, the great, the immortal 'Sappho!'"

"Oh, stuff and nonsense!"

"I tell you she is," Peggy insists. "She herself revealed to me the awful mystery last night. After you left I went back to the saloon, to get a book; and she came up and introduced herself —she's only Miss Penguin in the list of passengers, you know; but we sat down and had a long talk, and then she told me. Believe it or not, as you like, 'Sappho' is on board this steamer."

It was a startling announcement—nay, it was almost incredible. Talk of the responsibility of the ship that bore Virgil away to Athens! Here were we carrying with us the perfervid poetess, the *Æolia puella*, the modern and much-wailing Sappho, with her distractions and agonies and cries. But in the midst of one's astonishment Peggy begins to giggle.

"I think she is horribly disappointed that no one on board has found out who she is. But how could we? I never saw a single photograph of her in any shop. And she says her *incognito* is necessary, because her sympathies with the Americans are well known, and she is afraid the Turkish authorities might make trouble—"

"But which is she?—which one of them is it?"

"Why, you must have noticed her—the lady who goes about leading a dog."

"What!—the dowdily dressed woman who spends the whole of the day nursing that hideous little beast?"

"Oh, for shame! Why, that is Phaon. And isn't it too cruel, too ignominious, that Phaon has to be handed over every night to the charge of the butcher? Nobody but that unfeeling, hard-hearted Purser could have made such a stipulation."

At this point Peggy suddenly alters her tone, and becomes very confidential.

"I say, do you think I might show you a little poem? It was intrusted to me last night, in great secrecy; but I rather think she would like it to be discreetly shown about. You see, it is her idea of the kind of thing that poetry should aim at. The poets of the present day, she says, have no passion—"

"What does an elderly spinster know about passion?"

"I'm not good at conundrums; I merely tell you what she says. And here are the verses—I'll chance it; read them and give them back to me before any one comes up."

There was no difficulty about reading them; the handwriting was punctiliously neat.

*He plucked the last long golden hair*
*From off his velvet coat:*
*'Adieu, my Ever-fairest Fair!'—*
*My lean hands seized his throat!*

*He groaned and gurgled to the ground,*
*His white lips moaned 'Farewell!'*
*High Heaven heard the awful sound—*
*A shudder ran through Hell!*

*The whinnering whirlwind flared and fleered;*
*The oak trees coiled and curled;*
*The gasping earth-fires glimmered weird;*
*Blue lightnings shook the world.*

*His arms were round me in a mist;*
*A simoon was his breath:*
*A crimson stain—ah, God, I kissed*
*The Panther-Kiss of Death!*

"Well?" says Peggy.

"Why, it is just splendid!"

"Oh, that doesn't mean anything," she retorts, with impatience. "Invent a good lie for me—do! I must say something to her."

"Tell her that it is simply impossible for you to express your admiration."

"Hm—yes—that might answer," says Peggy, doubtfully; but at this juncture our morning conference is broken in upon, for there appears on the scene a certain Mrs. Spiteful, whose small gibes and sarcasms and enigmatic references to Magna Charta Island it is unnecessary to set down here.

A shining blue day followed—a day without incident. Next morning found us opposite the cliffs of Cape Roca, with the ghostly hills of Cintra rising pale and cloud-like beyond that silver blaze of sea. And again a perfect day: indeed, we seemed to have got all the winds of Æolus tied up and packed securely away in the Purser's office. But all this time we were getting to know more and more about our companions, and also on occasion making one or two new acquaintances. Among the latter was a delightful old gentleman, generally spoken of as the Major—a short, plump, roseate, cheerful, smartly-dressed person of sixty-five or so, who, from an early part of the voyage, had clearly marked out our Peggy for his own. But the Major had one unfortunate failing. Ordinarily the very soul of good-nature, he nevertheless was easily put out, just for a moment, by small trifles; and on these occasions, and no matter who his companion might be, he was in the habit of using very strong language, which he fondly imagined he uttered under his breath. Now, the Major detested Phaon, and for some reason or another detested Phaon's mistress as well; and whenever the Passionate Spinster approached Peggy, while the latter and the testy old warrior were talking together, he would mutter the most frightful anathemas, and forthwith betake himself to some other part of the ship. Indeed, Peggy was forced to complain.

"You really must speak to the Major," said she. "I never heard such *profanity. Tell him* he may think it, but he mustn't *say it. And it's all about nothing.* What has poor Phaon ever

done to him? Sometimes Phaon gets his leading-string round your ankles, and trips you up; but it isn't intentional. You must tell the Major he is mistaken in supposing that people cannot overhear him. Words like 'nurse' and 'jam' are perfectly innocent, of course; but I object to the words that rhyme to them. And what harm has Sappho done to him? She never showed *him* any poetry. Once, indeed, she was repeating to us some verses from 'The Isles of Greece,' and when she came to 'Place me on Sunium's marbled steep,' he said, quite aloud, 'I wish to heavens I could—and leave you there!' So that if anybody has the right to be offended it is she—if she heard him—and not he."

But we did not feel called upon to remonstrate with the Major. Human beings have their ways; and we were well content to take him as he was.

It was on this afternoon that Ernest Wolfenberg came to us and said if we would walk along to the fore-saloon we should have an opportunity of looking at some of Miss Dumaresq's work. It was an ordeal that at least one of us would rather not have faced. For this was not a question of a vain and half-cracked creature submitting her spasmodic verses for private scrutiny. Here was a man, himself a great artist, who believed in the woman who was his constant companion and friend; he seemed to think far more of her fame and future position than of anything pertaining to himself; and there had even been some serious discussion about the best method of placing a number of her water-color drawings before the British public. Well, as it turned out, there was no call for any alarm. The very first glimpse we had of the contents of the great portfolio showed that here was virile stuff. Blunt it might be, and uncompromising, even brutal, in its directness; but about its strength, its vividness, its originality, there could be no doubt whatever. And Amélie Dumaresq was no longer the petted child; she had thrown aside that affectation; she stood before these things silent, not breathlessly concerned about any judgment, nor professing to be so. And we, ignorant as we were, surely we knew that work of this kind, however incomplete and immature it might be in certain ways, had not been produced without pain and struggle and searching of heart? There was no fear of any *critic or any school of* critics visible here. She had seen certain

THE GREAT PORTFOLIO SHOWED THAT HERE WAS VIRILE STUFF.

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things with the vision of an artist; she had aimed at them by such methods as were known to her; and even where a false note seemed to have been struck, that, doubtless, was also intentional. For example, there was one drawing that represented a number of fashionable people promenading on a lawn—some sea-side Sunday-morning ceremony most likely: the women in summer costumes, white, pink, mauve, jet-black—sun-shades cream-colored, crimson, pure scarlet—everything clear, literal, and distinct; but not only that; where she had come to a gown of false green against the true green of the grass, there it was likewise. French, no doubt, all this was; but it had precision and individuality; and it was an individuality without impertinence.

No, it was not she, it was he, who seemed a trifle nervous and anxious; and when she had gone away with the big portfolio, and when he returned with us to the after-part of the deck, his eager talk was still about her and her pictures, defending, explaining, belauding, and all the while assuming, or appearing to assume (this was the most curious part of it), that he, the master, the assured and accomplished artist, and she, the audacious amateur, were on one and the same plane.

"What, now, do you think your Academicians would say?" he went on. "Are there very bigoted cliques among them? Would they denounce her for realism? And yet it seems to me that whoever sees nothing but realism in Miss Dumaresq's work sees nothing. There is Art—Art speaking in one of its many tongues, and perhaps not easily to be understood by the multitude. You are not likely to find one gifted with her perceptions aiming at mere fidelity, or carried away by any bald theory about truth. She understands as well as any one that Art is conventional, and must be conventional. 'Art is Art because it is *not* Nature.' Whoever talked as Shakespeare's characters talk? What girl ever spoke of cutting her lover into little stars so as to make the heavens shine? These men and women in Shakespeare's plays speak as no men or women ever spoke; and yet they are more human than any men or women whom we know or are ever likely to know. It is simply Art talking in one of its conventional languages; you value it because of what it brings. Look at our dialect stories, as they are called," he continued, leaning back in his deck-chair with his hands behind his head. "No doubt certain *peculiarities of diction* are faithfully reproduced. But what

is the value of that? If the human nature it reveals is poor and mean and contemptible, what is gained by this affectation of truth? For it is not the truth. If you were to report a man's conversation as he speaks it, you would have a story a life-time long. It is the business of Art to select and condense, to pick out the salient points of character, and speech, and circumstance; and I don't care how conventional the language may be so long as the human beings live and interest me. Accuracy is the aim of pedants and fools. When I see Rosalind come down the stage, resplendent in her white satin and lace veil, I don't stop to ask where she got her wedding-dress in the middle of the Forest of Arden. And so I hope you have not formed any prejudice against Miss Dumaresq's work because at first sight it appears a literal transcript. I think the more you study it you will perceive that it is more than that—that it is true Art—Art making use of a series of symbols—aiming at just and necessary compromise—and also expressing the individuality of the artist—"

Well, it was not for us to protest or assent: it was for him to lay down the law, and welcome. But there was something almost pathetic in the whole situation. It was as clear as daylight that he had thought out all these things to form a defence of Amélie Dumaresq, in case any one should object to the "realism" of her work. We had made no such objection; nay, in the case of outsiders like ourselves, what was demanded of us, and freely accorded, was appreciation, not criticism; but all the same, he appeared anxious to guard against what might be the conclusions of unspoken prejudice. It was a strange kind of undertaking for one in his position. For we could not but remember what his own work was. And although scarlet sunshades against a green lawn might command one's admiration for the moment, there was something other and finer than that dwelling in our memory—there was the mystic figure of the goddess, clad in vaporous veils of rain, dim, awful, and yet benignant as a pitying mother come up from the green deeps to comfort her son, weeping apart from his comrades by the shores of the grey sea. And we wondered whether Amélie Dumaresq quite knew what manner of man this was who stooped from his high estate to plead for her and defend her, even to the belittling of his own achievements.

But in the midst of this talk, which was sufficiently interesting *to us for several reasons*, there was a sudden and fierce ringing of

the bell—the fire-alarm! In an instant the whole ship was in commotion. Fore and aft there was swift but ordered movement: certain hands sprang to the davits to stand by the boats—others came hurrying along with bundles of blankets—others ran to the hydrants. In an incredibly short space of time every man was at his post; then there was a pause of inspection; and then, this rapid and unforeseen piece of drill being over, the men gradually returned to their ordinary duties. It was altogether admirably done; and we saw no reason to doubt that in actual case of fire this complicated manœuvre would be gone through with equal promptitude and accuracy.

That evening found us off Cape St. Vincent. There was a certain solemnity of appearance about those high and solitary cliffs that were sombrely lit up by the after-glow streaming over from the west; and then from time to time the tall lighthouse would send forth its silent signal—a shaft of golden flame coming out of the mystic grey of the eastern sky. But at dinner there was not much solemnity. For Amélie Dumaresq had ceased to be the artist who stood serene, and simple, and self-possessed while we looked at the contents of the big portfolio; she was again the spoiled and petted child; she was teasing this one and laughing towards that; an atmosphere of enjoyment, of merriment, of delight in the mere fact of living, seemed to surround her; while one could hardly avoid the suspicion that she was well aware of the notice she was attracting—of the covert glances that admired, or envied her, the soft clear pallor of her complexion, her long-lashed dark eyes, her cherry-red mouth, her heavily-massed black hair, with its solitary diamond star. Poor Wolfenberg was entirely neglected. It was the women she was determined to fascinate. And so, while she bedazzled them with her laughing black eyes, or charmed them with her pretty and wilful ways, or shocked them with her iconoclastic paradoxes, he was fain to turn to the only other serious person at table, and to beg for some information about the accord granted to strangers by the Royal Academy. For even while she ignored him, he remained solicitous about her interests. It was with regard to the water-color room at Burlington House he now wanted to know.

But, as it chanced, we were on this evening to learn something more, and something *surprising* enough, concerning these two. *For a considerable time we had* lost sight of Lady Cameron, and

vaguely supposed she was writing letters in the saloon, hoping to post them at Tangier. But when she did rejoin us, she had a very different tale to tell. She crept down into our snug little corner aft of the wheel-box, and began to speak in a hushed and rather eager voice; and it soon became apparent that this was no mere discovery of a sham Sappho that she had now to communicate.

"I have had a long talk with Miss Dumaresq," she said, "and I cannot tell you how she startled me. It is the saddest story—one part of it; and then the other part of it very beautiful, I think. And I was quite surprised by her manner while she was telling it. There wasn't a trace of those airs and graces; she spoke with great feeling; I could hardly have imagined her showing such sympathy—"

"Yes, but what is it all about, Peggy?" put in Mrs. Threepenny-bit, to check this incoherent utterance.

"You will be quite as much astonished as I was," was the rejoinder, in those low and hurried tones. "And yet there is no secret about it. It is simply that Mr. Wolfenberg is already married—"

"Married!" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, in dismay; but it was only her own imaginings that had been at fault.

"Oh, and to a dreadful woman!" Peggy went on. "It is the most terrible story, that side of it. A man of his refined and imaginative temperament tied to a horrid creature, a coarse, vulgar, shameless—"

"Peggy," interposed her friend, with a little coldness, "when a young lady takes a marked and exceptional interest in a married man, I wouldn't altogether trust what that young lady might say about the married man's wife."

"But listen to this—listen to facts," Peggy persisted. "Fancy a woman who doesn't drink, but who used to pretend to drink in order to shame him before his friends! Fancy a woman who, knowing he had a particularly sensitive ear, used to take pathetic airs and bang them out on the piano as waltzes and polkas, simply to drive him from his work! Fancy a woman whose extravagance is not due to any liking for luxury, but merely because she knows it is his money she is throwing away right and left! That is a nice kind of creature for a man like Wolfenberg to be tied to!"

"Well, if it be so, it is all very sad and wretched," said the smaller woman, absently. "But it is a good thing for him he has a dream-world to take refuge in."

"Wait a moment," said Peggy. "That is only half the story. Now I come to the part of it that seems to me beautiful. Only I wish I could tell it to you as Miss Dumaresq told it to me. She spoke in quite a proud way; and then again the startling things she says don't sound so startling as coming from her, for you get used to her habit of knocking over accepted beliefs and traditions as if they were ninepins. What she practically said was this: 'The wrong that one woman has done him another woman must atone for; and I mean to try. He shall not be left quite alone. I cannot marry him, it is true; but if he were free to-morrow morning, I would not marry him. For one thing, marriage is the great disillusioner. If a man and a woman have a perfect regard and esteem and affection for each other, and if they wish to preserve these, then let them remain friends, firm and fast friends, and nothing more. An exalted and devoted friendship between two people of kindred tastes and sympathies, who thoroughly understand each other, who have absolute confidence in each other, and who have a constant delight in each other's society, is a far more durable and desirable thing than marriage with its hot-headed jealousies and wrangles, and, after a little while, its waning fires, followed by cold indifference.' Oh, I tell you," Peggy went on, "there is no beating about the bush with Amélie Dumaresq. She says the conjugal bond is the destroyer of all true comradeship between a man and a woman. For her own part, and quite outside these present circumstances, she says she wants to remain independent, and to have her companionship sought for as a favor and yielded voluntarily, not demanded as a right. She wants to follow out her own career, and has no mind to sink into the position of a housekeeper for any one else—looking after the dinner and the nursery. She says that if you wish the desire to meet each other, the delight in each other's society, as between a man and a woman, to be prolonged indefinitely, then do not barter away freedom and bring in the marriage pledge. Well, that is merely as regards her own position. But, really, when she began to describe Wolfenberg's broken life, his banishment from his own country, his loneliness, the very piteousness of the gratitude *he shows her* for her romantic association with

him, she gave evidence of a sympathy I should not have expected of her. To tell you the truth, I thought she was nothing but a pert, conceited, little chatterbox, fond of saying alarming things simply to attract attention. But she is more than that, Missis. I wish you heard her talk of Wolfenberg—of his simplicity of character, his unselfishness, his sensitive honor, his noble humility, his freedom from anything in the shape of envy, his generous recognition of work far inferior to his own, and I don't know what besides. Yes, I think there is something fine in her determination to stand by this man, who otherwise seems so solitary. I did not think the little Georgian, or Virginian, or whatever she is, was capable of rising to such a situation."

It was getting late; the two women had to go. But already it had become abundantly clear that they regarded this discovery from very different points of view.

"It seems to me quite a beautiful relationship," said Peggy, with a touch of enthusiasm, as they were bidding each other good-night.

But the elder woman shook her head, rather sadly.

"Do you think so?" she said. "Well, I hope it may prove to be so. But I am afraid. And wouldn't it be a terrible thing, Peggy, if the second part of your story were to turn out even more tragic than the first?"

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## CHAPTER III

### A DEVIATION

And again comes another resplendent morning; but now we find that a brisk breeze has sprung up; the rolling and heaving blue-black waves are flashing silver crests to the sun; and far away beyond the restless plain rise the pale hills of Africa, terminating in the lofty and precipitous Cape Spartel. The two early risers are on deck, and alone.

"Listen to me," says Peggy, perching herself high and comfortably on the wheel-box—so high, indeed, that the light reflected upward from the sea removes the ordinary shadows from her *face, and you* would think there was a supernatural radiance

shining there. "Do you know what the man said after he had read aloud the Ten Commandments?"

"There never was any such man!" one answers her, impatiently; for Peggy's ways are known.

"He said: 'And now to turn to something really serious.' And so I want you to tell me honestly—as honestly as you can—whether it is true we are going in to Tangier, after all?"

"Well, the officers seem to say this is a bad wind for landing: there will be a heavy surf."

"Where are we going, then?"

"Who knows? We may turn in to Gib. Or make for Algiers; or Tunis. We have no cargo to deliver or take up, so we have all the world to choose from."

"And you consider that amusing? I do not in the least. For look here." She produces the table of conditions under which we took our berths. "Did you notice this clause?—'*The ship may deviate for any purpose and to any extent.*' What do you think of that? What does that mean? Perhaps you rather like a deviating ship. I don't, I can tell you. Suppose it should deviate us against an unknown island?"

"It would please me to see you and the Major shipwrecked on a desert coast. You would make a romantic couple. At present it must be painful for you to know that there are about fifteen cameras on board, and that at any moment one of them may be snapping you from behind your back. Why, the universal amateur photographer must have as wholesome a constraint over you as your sister Emily."

"At all events," she retorts, "it is a good thing there is one person on board who treats me with respect. *He* wouldn't say spiteful things. He wouldn't be rude to a poor lone widow. He is always gallant, and courteous, and anxious to please. He fetches my chair for me; and sees that the cushion is right; and gives me a castle when I play chess with him—he would give me a queen if I'd take it, and be delighted to be beaten every time. And just wait until we get into port: you'll see who will have the prettiest bouquets of all the women on this ship—and I know who will bring them to her." Then of a sudden she changes her tone. "I say—about Emily. I suppose there's no doubt about our deviating towards Palermo? A fine thing it would be if the Baby were *left stranded all by* herself in a hotel!"

"Oh, we shall get to Palermo all right. But why do you still call her the Baby? She must be nearly eighteen by now."

"She is eighteen; and she is as tall as I am; and weighs five pounds more."

"A very promising Baby, indeed!"

And so as the morning went by we bored our way into the Straits, against a hot east wind and a heavily-running sea; and passed the yellow and grey-scarred rock of Gib, with Ceuta over there in the south; and ploughed onwards and onwards into the ever-widening Mediterranean. Algiers, it was now known, was our destination, and there was no murmur; some of us, indeed, would have been content to leave land untouched for the next three months if only the provisions were likely to last. For the more we got to know of those excellent Orotanians, the more we esteemed them and their prevailing good humor and kindness and courtesy; and there were plenty of amusements and occupations to pass those long sunlit hours withal, even if we had not had enough of other interests both within and without our own small circle. For personal relationships develop rapidly at sea; and in these combinations it seemed to us as though every side of human nature was being displayed to us.

That evening Wolfenberg brought Amélie Dumaresq along to our accustomed retreat, with some little apology for the very welcome intrusion. It was a beautiful night; the sea had gone down considerably; there was a cloudless sky; a few pale stars were visible, with one golden planet shining full and clear in the deep violet vault.

"I want Miss Dumaresq to hear for herself," said he, as we made room for them, "what you think about her first coming before the British public—the best way, I mean. You say the water-color room at the Academy is not much frequented?"

"On the contrary, it is exceedingly popular—as a rendezvous for people going to lunch."

"You would prefer a room in Bond Street—a little exhibition all to herself?" he continued. "I was only a short time in London, and got to know very few people—I was too busy with the picture-galleries; but if this project came off, I could have plenty of introductions from the other side, and we might secure two or three influential people who would get the little collection talked of. The Academicians wouldn't frown, would they, at *this apparent independence*?"

"Of course not. They would be more likely to come to the Private View, if you asked them."

"Not that I would have her neglect the Academy—not at all," said he, with some solicitude. "The fact is, although she has been working in oils, she is not quite so familiar with that medium yet; but later on I would have her send in a picture in oils to the Academy."

"Lady Cameron," said Miss Dumaresq, with a rueful little smile, "how would you like to be in my position? How would you like to know yourself a very small person, and find an artist like Mr. Wolfenberg bothering about you, and treating you as if you were of importance? Talk of my appealing to the British public!" she went on in another strain. "I know who ought to appeal, and who would appeal with some effect, and that is Mr. Wolfenberg himself. I think it is a shame he should be known in England only by his reputation. But buyers are so selfish. If they weren't so selfish, I tell you what I should like. I should like a loan exhibition in our own country of all Mr. Wolfenberg's paintings—a complete collection. For people are apt to forget what a range of subjects a painter may have covered, and they judge him by the picture of the moment—"

"There I don't agree with you, Amélie," he said, with gentleness. "The critics may. But the public are more generous. The public judge of a man by his best work, and give him his reputation from his best work. When an artist has painted a great picture, the public give him his position; they put him on a pedestal; and they don't call on him to come down if his subsequent work, however sincere, should be unequal. The world does not bother about striking averages; that is left to the critic. The world marks the highest rung of the ladder a man has reached, and writes his name on the wall there, to remain."

"Well, Ernest, you, at least, have no right to complain of the critic; they have always been most kind to you," Miss Dumaresq interposed, pleasantly.

"The critic," he said, in an absent kind of way, "so seldom remembers that it may be himself—his own capacity or incapacity—he is revealing to the public. When Carlyle wrote his article on Scott, he was not giving us the measure of Walter Scott, he was giving us the measure of Thomas Carlyle."

But there was *no indifferentism*, either of manner or speech,

about him when—Mrs. Dumaresq having come to call her daughter away for some purpose or another—he was left free to speak on a subject that more nearly concerned him.

"I confess," he said, "I am looking forward with a little disquiet to this visit of Miss Dumaresq's to the East. It was I who urged her mother and herself to go. I thought it would be a kind of education for Amélie; and with the future she has before her, all the best possible influences should be brought to bear on her. And yet I don't quite know that she will understand the 'brooding East'—the Mother of Dreams and Mysteries. Amélie comes of the 'impious younger world.' You must have noticed what a terribly candid mind she has," he said, rather addressing himself to Mrs. Threepenny-bit.

"Yes, indeed," said that person, frankly.

"But not hard and literal—not unreceptive," he interposed, hastily. "She has really a fine sympathy for fine things; only, as I say, the things must be fine. And she has the most profound contempt for the ordinary funny American; you need fear nothing on that score. I think you said you would allow her to go about with you a little when you went ashore anywhere?—you see, her mother is something of an invalid, and is not likely to leave the ship much. And you need not be afraid of any of that affected irreverence—any of that continuous and feeble flippancy that becomes so distressing."

"Oh, no, no, no, Mr. Wolfenberg!" the small woman says. "We shall be delighted to have Miss Dumaresq with us. If we have to fear any irreverence or mischief-making, it is from this American Highlander here."

"Oh, listen to her!" exclaims Peggy, with awe-stricken eyes. "Me? You accuse me of such a thing! And you," she goes on, turning to her other neighbor, "what have you to say to such a charge? Have you not a word in my defence?"

"'The noblest answer unto such Is perfect stillness when they brawl.'"

But yet again Peggy speaks up on her own behalf—and speaks up boldly too.

"Why, as for that," she says, "don't you imagine you are going to turn me into a regulation tourist. I will not be instructed on any pretence whatever. I will not follow a guide about. I will not read up history."

"Not a little English history?" puts in the small woman, with her usual ignoble sarcasm.

"And I like the notion," continues Peggy, "of you two talking to me about my serious duties!—you two, who are the most obstinately indolent, the very worst sight-seers I ever beheld! But do as you please. Swallow all the churches and mosques if you like. But not for me, thank you. Why, the only idea of an Englishman that exists in the French imagination is that he is a tall man with a red book. Well, I don't wish to be ticketed off in that way. I am a free-born American, I am. Sacramento was my dwelling-place, and Scotland is my nation—"

"What your salvation is likely to be," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit (for she, too, has heard of the old rhyme), "it would be hard to say—unless you keep a more civil tongue in your head."

Next morning we were nearing the end of the first stage of our voyage. And yet it cannot be said that these familiar features around us had grown in any way monotonous; nay, they had been constantly beautiful—the long decks ablaze in the sunshine; the gently-moving shadows of the ropes and spars; the soft twilight under the awnings; outside the great circle of blue sea—that deep, opaque, fierce Mediterranean blue that is like nothing else in heaven or earth; and overhead the pale sky of the south—a faint rose-purple, fading to white at the horizon. But all the same, as we slowly steamed into the vivid green waters of the harbor of Algiers, there was something in change; and the eye rather welcomed those brilliantly-colored boats, with their swarthy boatmen. And then, instead of sea and sky meeting featureless all around the horizon, here was a great shining city—a perfect blaze of yellow-white buildings on the face of a long ridge of hill that was crowned by far-extending masses of olive-green foliage. Picturesque enough in its way: the shimmering, translucent water, with its parti-colored craft; then the long extent of arched stores and wharves; then the tall, French-looking terraces; then the mass of flat-roofed Moorish houses, with here and there the rounded dome of a mosque. Not so impressive, naturally, as a wholly Eastern city; but nevertheless something novel to look upon—after those long days of blue-and-silver glancing seas.

Of course there was some little excitement about going ashore, parties being hastily formed, and the eager ones getting early away

in the ship's boats. Our own little group, including Wolfenberg and Miss Dumaresq, lingered for long irresolute, hardly knowing whether it was worth while in view of our leaving again in the afternoon; but finally we decided upon going in the very last boat, which happened to be the steam-launch. And yet it was not we who were responsible for any delay; it was the Passionate Poetess; for just as we had all got comfortably settled in the launch, and the engineer was about to set the screw revolving, she appealed to the Purser.

"One moment, Mr. Purser, please! I really cannot leave my little dog! I am so afraid of those men! I will not detain you a minute."

Black grew the Purser's brows; but he did not utter a word; while Sappho hurriedly got out, and began to ascend the accommodation-ladder with such speed as was possible in the circumstances. To us it mattered little, but she certainly was a long time away; then we beheld her coming down again, her precious charge borne in one arm. Would that that had been all! But at the foot of the ladder a dreadful accident occurred. Her foot slipped somehow; she clung to the iron stanchion with one hand; inevitably she swung round; and alas! in saving herself from being pitched headforemost into the sea, she was forced for a moment to abandon Phaon, who incontinently tumbled down on to the grating and next into the water. Immediately there was a mighty commotion: it was as if a baby had to be saved. Arms were stretched out—and stretched out in vain; Sappho, who had sprung on board the launch, called frantically on Phaon; while the fat little grey pug, with his black snout and wrinkled forehead well out of water, was splashing away with his fore-paws, and swimming, as much as he could swim, in the wrong direction. And then the man at the bow, seizing a boat-hook, made a dash at him. Sappho shrieked.

"Don't!—don't!—you'll kill him!" she called, piteously; for she evidently thought the man wanted to gaff the animal, as one would gaff a salmon.

But what he really meant to do was to hook up the silken string attached to Phaon's collar; and in this he succeeded; the dog was led down aft, and hauled on board, and delivered to his mistress; and she, exhausted by these wild emotions, and overjoyed to get her beloved into the very midst of us, made him

finally secure by depositing him, streaming, and shaking himself, and winking his beady eyes, right on to the Major's polished boots.

What our respected friend said upon this occasion can never now be known; for there was a sudden rattle of the engine and a whir of the screw; but, as he tried to withdraw his feet from under this sprawling encumbrance, there was a look on his face that was too awful to contemplate without apprehension. And what must she do but heap insult upon injury?

"Major, would you mind holding this for a moment?" she said, handing him the blue silken string. "Phaon is so impulsive—so impetuous—"

"Nurse and jam the confounded little beast!" said the Major—or rather it was something resembling these sounds that escaped from between his set teeth; but probably she did not hear, for there was such a spluttering noise from the engine. At all events, he was forced to hold the string for her; while she proceeded to open her hand-bag, and from thence she took a small brush, and with that she began to smooth down Phaon's dripping coat, while in vain did the Major try to get his feet away from the prancing and dancing of those four restless legs. We began to fear that Phaon would not see the end of this voyage.

Meanwhile we got ashore, and climbed the stifling hot steps, and crossed the blinding white Boulevard, and were glad to escape from the glare of the sunlight into the cool shadows of the Jardin Marengo, with its branching palms, and bamboos, and tall tamarinds. But Mrs. Threepenny-bit, mindful of former days on the Nile, and anxious to renew her acquaintance with those Arabs whose dignity of deportment she had always so much admired, was soon ready to be off again. Had she not under her wing this young American, whose nascent artist-mind was hungering after new impressions?

And as we went wandering idly through the town, choosing the more shaded thoroughfares, one could not but admire the delicate way in which Wolfenberg recognized that Amélie Dumaresq had been confided to the elder lady's charge. He claimed no right of association; he was just as the others; nay, he rather kept away from her. But at times, of course, he had to call her attention to this thing or that; and then he would do so in a curiously respectful way. For example, in the Rue Bab Azoun we came upon

an oddly incongruous sight—a shabby-looking little French omnibus filled with grave and stately and silent Arabs, in their turbans and flowing white robes.

"Amélie," he said, stepping up to her, "there is a subject for you."

She glanced in the direction indicated.

"It is too bizarre," she answered him.

"It is Algiers," he said, and then he fell back again into the order of our procession.

For we were going two and two, and even then we did not escape remark. The Major and Lady Cameron led the way, and no doubt they were conspicuously foreigners; the Major being plump, and fresh-colored, and cheerful-looking, while Peggy was tall, and fair-complexioned, and handsome. And now it was that Mrs. Threepenny-bit grew wroth. For while the Arabs, calm, serious, impassive of demeanor, went by without appearing to take the slightest notice of us, the low-class French population turned to stare at the strangers, grinning, chattering, and nudging each other. Nay, one yellow-skinned little wretch of a boy had the audacity to look up at our Peggy, and say, "Ole raight!" This it was that set the smaller woman's soul ablaze.

"Miss Dumaresq," said she, "has it ever occurred to you that it is only the northern nations of Europe that have the faculty of laughing? The French never laugh. They haven't the physique. They can only snigger." Here, indeed, was a stupendous generalization; and all because an impudent little Algerian gamin had mocked at our tall young friend from Inverfask.

There was, of course, nothing of this kind when we had got away up into the Arab quarter of the city. As we were slowly perambulating the steep and narrow thoroughfares, and admiring the endless variety and picturesqueness of costume and color, Miss Dumaresq turned to her temporary guardian.

"When we came ashore at first," said she, "I thought we had made a mistake. I thought we had got into nothing but a second-rate French town. But now I should like to spend six months in Algiers—or three or four times that."

"You are beginning too soon," said her companion, with a smile. "At least, if you go on in the same way, by the time we have finished this voyage you will have formed plans for two lifetimes."

THE MAJOR AND LADY CAMERON LED THE WAY.

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When at last we made away back again for the Boulevard, and came in sight of the Hôtel de l'Europe, we descried various groups of our fellow-Orotanians, just as you are sure to find English people hanging about Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo. The first person we encountered inside was the Passionate Spinster, who was in dire distress, for she could get nobody to attend to her. So she threw herself upon us. She besought the Major to find a safe corner in the saloon, where Phaon might be tied up. She asked if she might have a seat at our table. And when, after lunch, it was suggested that, instead of sending for two carriages, we ought simply to charter one of those small omnibuses with the open windows and curtains, which would be so much cooler, and would accommodate the whole of us, she eagerly embraced that proposition, counting herself in. And thus it was that she who claimed kinship with 'the Lesbian woman of immortal fame' bestowed her society on us during our drive out to Mustafa Inférieur. Why not? After all, human beings are of different kinds, and the world is wide.

"Yes, but an Algerian omnibus is narrow," said the Major, subsequently; and the mere recollection of his sufferings once more aroused in him a furious wrath. "By heavens, I will strangle that little beast if it ever comes near my legs or feet again!"

Before we got under way that afternoon, an apparently trifling incident occurred which we had occasion afterwards to recall. A French Colonel and his wife, with their little girl, had come out to look over the ship; and while the former were talking to the captain, the latter was being made much of by a number of the young ladies on board. But this small creature of seven or eight remained proof against all their blandishments. She was absolutely imperturbable, regarding them, it is true, but not responding in any way whatever. They tried her with various kinds of French, including that of Ollendorff and that of Stratford-atte-Bowe—*Aimez-vous l'Afrique? . . . Vas-tu promener partout à voir le vaisseau? . . . Allons, descendons au salon et je te donnerai des sucrés. . . . Petite, serrez les mains chez moi. . . . Travaillez-vous à vos leçons, mademoiselle? . . . N avez-vous pas une seule parole pour nous? . . . As-tu regardé le capitaine de la shippe?* . . . Such were the rags and tags of this ingenuous and one-sided conversation that came floating towards us. But no; they could win *no response*. She remained quite impassive and silent.

Now it was at this moment that a young Russian who had not gone ashore—indeed, he had hitherto mixed but little with his fellow-passengers—came along, took up the book he had left in his deck-chair, and, sitting down, began to read. He was quite near to this small child, but he did not pay any attention to her; she, on the contrary, regarded him attentively for a moment or two, and then, as if drawn by curiosity or by some more occult attraction, went close up to his chair. He became aware of her approach, and raised his eyes from his book. Very beautiful eyes they were, if it is not absurd to call a man's eyes beautiful—blue-grey, dark-lashed, and full of light; and when they were bent on this small, inquisitive stranger, she, who had hitherto seemed so entirely abstracted and indifferent, smiled in response. Nay, she held out her tiny hand. "*Bonjour, monsieur!*" she said. And of course he accepted that timid proffer of comradeship at once; he spoke to her; she replied to him, in her pretty and childish way; and so, in the most simple and easy fashion in the world, these two had become friends.

"Did you notice that?—isn't that remarkable?" said Amélie Dumaresq, in a quick undertone, to Wolfenberg. "Tell me, Ernest, who is he?—he hardly ever speaks to any one."

"He is a Russian—Hitrovo—Paul Hitrovo," was the answer, also uttered guardedly.

"Do you know him? Have you talked with him?"

"A little."

"Will you introduce him to me—some other time?"

Wolfenberg looked surprised, almost startled.

"Oh, yes, if you wish it—oh, yes, certainly," he said—while the fascinated small French girl was still standing by Paul Hitrovo's chair, listening to him, and looking up into his smiling eyes.

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## CHAPTER IV

### AN INTRODUCTION

And again the gods have given us a gracious morning: the heavens cloudless and serene; the far-stretching circle of the sea rolling its blue-black waves and lapping and flashing in the sun;

an unstable world save for the long and mountainous rampart down there in the south — the grey-scarred and sterile-looking cliffs of the African coast. And here, under the welcome shade of the awning, one comes upon two of the passengers who appear to be in close and earnest confabulation. It is of Wolfenberg and Amélie Dumaresq they are talking.

"Well, Missis," says the Lady of Inverfask, addressing her friend by the last invented of all her innumerable sobriquets, "I cannot understand why you should be so apprehensive. You yourself admit that such a relationship would be beautiful, if only it could be made permanent. What is to hinder its being permanent? Miss Dumaresq would tell you that it is all the more likely to last because there is no bond, because it is voluntary, because each knows that the other could break away. What she says is simply this: 'Husbands and wives lead a far happier life, a far more equable and contented life, when they have ceased to be lovers, and have become good friends. Why, then, should not Mr. Wolfenberg and I take up the latter half of this relationship, since the former is impossible?' You know her frank way of speaking. And her ideas are as clear as her speech. She is no school-girl, with her head full of sentiment and dreams. She has seen the world. She has had experience of men—and not a very fortunate one, I imagine: you see the family are rich; and I rather fancy, from one or two things she said, that she has made unpleasant discoveries — or, at least, had unpleasant suspicions — with regard to certain of the young men who came about her. But here is a man whom she can absolutely trust; whom she admires and respects beyond measure; with whom she is in sympathy on every point; and why should not their close and constant association together be as permanent as any marriage-bond? According to her, it is the conjugal relationship that disenchants; here there can be no disenchantment; they remain to each other just as they are. And look at their comradeship in art: another tie. She must perceive that he has all the qualities that she lacks: another reason for sympathy. And then his solitary position; she pities him; she is resolved to stand by him—oh, I don't see that you should be so apprehensive!"

For a second or two the smaller woman was silent—looking absently across the flashing waters to the pale line of mountainous coast. *At last she said,*

"Well, Peggy, if I were Mr. Wolfenberg, I would go ashore at the very first port we come to, and I would make my way back to America."

"To be met at New York by that woman, with a troop of her drunken companions?"

The conversation could not be continued further; for at this moment Miss Dumaresq herself appeared, coming quickly along the deck, her head raised and careless, her arms swinging a little with the mere exuberance of life. The small and graceful figure looked neat in its Sunday-morning costume of black silk and white frills; and when she came up it was apparent that she had paid particular heed to her toilet—the high-arched, dark eyebrows had been touched, perhaps also the pretty mouth. But it was not of that she was thinking.

"I have some news for you," said she, with great animation, and her brilliant black eyes were full of pleasure and eagerness, "but it must not be spoken of; you must not mention it to any one; and especially not to Mr. Wolfenberg. He has just been telling me; and what a surprise it is! For we quite understood that he was going to take the full seven weeks' holiday; but with an artist like him a sudden inspiration takes possession; and it is no use his trying to put it aside and turn to it later on. What do you think, then, of the subject Mr. Wolfenberg is considering? —the 'Fountain of Callirrhoe'!" She was quite breathless with the joy of this discovery; but she had to speak in tones of subdued excitement, for there were other people now coming along. "Can you not imagine what he will make of it—the deserted Greek girl killing herself by the side of the water—or, perhaps, the dead girl disappearing—I don't know; but this I do know, that it will be something to make one's fingers tremble and make one's eyes fill. It will be splendid—splendid! And no one must speak to him about it, or he will be anxious and discontented, and perhaps throw the subject aside altogether; no, it must be allowed to grow up of itself in his mind, quite in silence, and then—then some day you will see! And just think of this: he has asked my advice!—*my* advice!—as if I and my wooden dolls could be of any use to him! Prospero, the master of spirits, come to ask the advice of Caliban carving sticks!"

"At least it was a great honor," said Peggy.

"And *now* he will dream about that all the way until we get to

Athens," she went on—and really this exhilaration of interest added quite a new charm to the pretty face and the lustrous dark eyes; "and it does not matter whether the real fountain, if there is one, lends itself well or not; the picture will be already complete in his mind. I am delighted! You know I was rather afraid that mother and I had forced this idleness on him—he is so ready to sacrifice himself; and I feared, too, he might be bored by the society of two women. But now I am quite at ease. Now he will never want for companionship and for occupation so long as he has his picture to think about; and when you notice him walking up and down by himself, and not speaking to any one, you need not imagine he is idle. Ah, I tell you, you will see something when you see the 'Fountain of Callirrhoe'!"

Welcome news; but perhaps we were even better pleased, and more interested, in observing the genuine enthusiasm with which this girl spoke of Wolfenberg's work. That was, at least, one bond the more between these two oddly-situated persons.

This was a Sunday morning; there was service on deck, under the awning; the young women's voices sounded sweet and clear above the monotonous swish of the waves along the vessel's side.

In the afternoon the Passionate Spinster bore down upon us, bringing with her a whole armful of translations—and Lemprière. There was no escape; she had skilfully cut off retreat; and soon the tale of her unnumbered woes was unfolded. It turned out that she had heard from one of the officers that on the following morning we should be within sight of the shores of Sicily, the song-haunted island; and with a generous ardor she had set to work to prepare herself, first of all by tracing out the wanderings of Ulysses. But there were riddles and disappointments in the way; and now, as she spoke, the sandy-haired woman with the cold grey eyes seemed to be in a bit of a temper.

"It really is too bad!" she said, fretfully. "You can't trust one of these books. You would think that since they have been laboring away at their mechanical tasks through so many generations, there might be a little agreement among them. But why does one say, 'mother of dawn, the rosy-fingered morning,' while another says, 'daughter of dawn, the rosy-fingered morning'; and why do they write Aias when they mean Ajax; and what on earth is the use of saying Peleides instead of Achilles, and Atreides *instead of Agamemnon*?"

Now these were amazing questions to come from the perfervid Sappho, who continually adorns her pages with copious quotations from the Greek and Latin—inaccurate for the most part, no doubt, but of excellent intention.

"However, it is the geography that is most irritating," she continues, with more than a 'snap' of anger in her voice. "Look at the confusion caused by having Phæacia, Scheria, Corcyra, Corfu—four names—all for the same place! And one writer tells you that Calypso's island is Gozo, which is close by Malta, and another declares that it is Ogygia, supposed to be opposite Lacinium."

At this point, unhappily, the volume of Lemprière fell upon Phaon; and the lamentable howl that the poor little beast set up awoke the Major, who was asleep in a neighboring chair. The Major turned round, glared, muttered something, doubtless of an unholy character, to himself—and then, struggling to his feet, made his way to the grating surrounding the wheel-box, where he again sought soft slumber, though in a far more uncomfortable position.

"You see they *will not* call anything by a simple name!" exclaimed our poetess, with a savage wrath, which we were sorry to see agitating so celestial a mind. "When Ulysses, after leaving Æolia, is shipwrecked, he is thrown upon the coasts of the Læstrygones; but the coasts of the Læstrygones are simply Sicily!—and it is Sicily that he has quite recently left, after having escaped from the giant Polyphemus—"

"Miss Penguin, why should you bother with boys' stories!" interposed Amélie Dumaresq, with a touch of disdain. "Sicily, for me, will be the land of Hermione, and Perdita, and the good Camillo, and the statue that becomes a woman before the eyes of the King. That is something worth thinking about!"

"And I," puts in our Peggy, "am going to find out from which port Antigonus and Hermione's child could have sailed when they were blown on the shores of Bohemia."

"The shores of Bohemia?" is the incredulous cry.

"Yes," she says, calmly. "Didn't you know that the dukes of Bohemia had possessions and seaports on the Adriatic coast?" For Peggy is always flourishing this profound piece of erudition before us—though some of us may have dark doubts as to its *authenticity*.

Meanwhile, what had become of the young Russian whose beautiful eyes had thawed the frigidity of the little French girl; and what had become of the introduction that Amélie Dumaresq had asked for? Well, for one thing, M. Paul Hitrovo was rather a mysterious and enigmatical young man. Beyond the fact that he generally passed the morning in the deck smoking-room, whiling away the time with cigarettes, no one could say precisely how or where he spent the remainder of the day. He rarely mixed with his fellow-passengers; he never joined in any of the games forward; he came late to meals, and remained after the others had left. Then, again, a formal introduction is an unusual, and a marked, thing on board ship: we could understand Wolfenberg's embarrassment over her blunt request. On board ship people make each other's acquaintance through a variety of little accidents, or through some chance talking to a common friend. But as for going to a young man and saying that a certain young lady wished that he should be introduced to her—how was such a thing to be done, especially when the go-between was so proud and sensitive a person as Ernest Wolfenberg? He of all men would be the first to shrink from anything that seemed to compromise, in the remotest degree, this young lady who had made so unexpected a demand.

And, indeed, it was in a quite haphazard fashion that their coming together was accomplished, on this same Sunday afternoon. The Dumaresqs and several others had gone below to have tea, and they had just taken their places when Hitrovo came into the saloon, looking around him in his customary indolent, good-natured way.

"Won't you come to our table?" said Wolfenberg.

"If I may," he answered, smiling; and forthwith he installed himself in one of the chairs, opposite Miss Dumaresq and her mother.

There was no set introduction. After a second or two he quite naturally and simply joined in the general talk, speaking excellent English, with hardly a trace of accent. He was singularly good-looking; he had pleasant manners; so far from trying to impress or shine, he seemed in a measure indifferent; and those clear blue-grey eyes of his, when they lighted on a woman, bespoke favor for him. But the *curious thing* was that his coming to this table *appeared to have frozen up* Amélie Dumaresq. Ordinarily eager

and animated, thrilling with life and loquacious, she was now constrained and embarrassed; she did not glance his way at all; she kept her eyes downcast or averted; she was silent. Her mother might join in this random conversation about the ship and our prospects: she had not one word. For the first time since we had made her acquaintance she seemed to have lost her self-possession; and on that account it was all the more marked. But Hitrovo did not appear to notice; he had enough to do in talking to these other ladies, who were all more or less strangers to him. And when at length he went away, it was clear that he had impressed them most favorably.

"Well, Amélie, I brought him to you," Wolfenberg said, with a smile.

"Yes, Ernest," she answered, with some touch of confusion. "I—I did want to find out something about him—after the incident with the little French girl. That struck me. But I hardly wonder at it. He has extraordinary eyes."

So she had glanced at him, after all?

"That French child," said Mrs. Dumaresq, "has begun early to find out that gentlemen's eyes may be attractive."

"There was more than that, mamma. She went up to him while he was still reading," the daughter made reply; but she was clearly not inclined to enter into any discussion about this young man, or his looks, or ways, or manners. Presently she rose and left the table, and went up on deck, taking her book with her, and choosing a chair where she could be by herself.

Towards evening we could make out the sharp peaks of Galita Island, far away ahead of us in the mystic grey of the east; and as night closed round us there was the golden ray of the lighthouse streaming out from time to time.

The morning found us among the Ægadean Isles, off the west coast of Sicily—those lonely and voiceless rocks, lofty, and arid, and scarred—their ruddy cliffs set in a perfect calm of blue sea. Sappho was running all about the ship, imploring people to tell her whether it was on the mainland or on one of those islands that Ulysses encountered the Cyclops; Peggy was delighted to discover that we should reach Palermo early in the afternoon, for she wanted to snatch away the Baby from all possibility of brigands; Mrs. Threepenny-bit was expecting letters, to learn how *many more teeth* her precious boys had had knocked out at foot-

ball; and the Major was secretly disclosing to one or two friends a plan he had formed for enticing Phaon away from his mistress in the streets of Palermo, and introducing him to a sausage-maker. In short, there was quite a stir with the beginning of the new week and our nearing another halting-place. Even Paul Hitrovo came on deck, and talked a little with Mrs. Dumaresq, her daughter standing by, looking on and listening.

But it was with Wolfenberg that Amélie Dumaresq spent most of the morning and noon, for no doubt the two artists had much to observe and talk of in common, as we steamed on by Cape St. Vito, and across the Gulf of Castellamare, and past the evil-named Punta dell' Uomo Morto, making onwards for Cape Gallo. This northern coast of Sicily is magnificently picturesque: vast and precipitous cliffs of a sombre red, here and there rising into darker peaks, about as sharp as the Aiguilles overlooking the Mer de Glace, here and there dipping into a spacious valley, with groves of orange and citron sweltering in the heat. A lonely coast it seemed, too: it was at long intervals that a little grey powder, as it were—a thin, insignificant line at the foot of those giant cliffs—revealed a village down by the shore. In times of storm and louring skies, these bold headlands, and the long spurs terminating in a solitary lighthouse, must look grand indeed; but now, as we saw them across the trembling and shimmering blue sea, they had grown visionary and spectral in the haze of settled fine weather. The intervening air seemed to be dense with sunlight.

And what did those two think of Palermo—Palermo the Superb—as we slowly steamed into the pellucid green water? To the non-professional eye the more striking features were obvious enough: a noble bay, far extending, with long moles and promenades; white terraces just above the sea; public gardens, with foliage of freshest verdure; then the gradually-ascending town, with its countless domes and spires; and behind all that a mighty semicircle of mountains, twisted and torn and thrown about as if by the hand of some scene-painter gone out of his senses. Indeed, one began to ask one's self if all this were quite real—if it were solid, in fact. Was there not some strange suggestion of some huge wooden frame, with a breadth of shivering canvas stretched over it? Those white terraces, and green gardens, and domes and *spires, and wildly*-twisted mountain-peaks, were they

permeable to a draught of air coming from over the stalls? And if one were to whistle suddenly, would not a number of dusky and shabby men immediately rush out and run the whole panoramic thing away on wheels?

If this was what Amélie Dumaresq was thinking of the imposing city before her, she was speedily startled out of her reverie. All at once, and just as we were about getting to our anchorage, but while there was still considerable way on the vessel, it was discovered that the steam steering-gear had got out of order. The swiftness with which this mishap was rectified was admirable. Before any of the passengers quite understood what had happened, the first officer and four or five of the hands had hurried aft to the wheel, unshipped the case, got the mechanism into working-trim, and the next minute the ship was answering her helm just as if nothing had occurred. And presently we heard the sonorous call, "Let go the anchor!"—followed by a roar and a plunge that must have made that canvas city quake.

Then the various boats that had come out from the harbor—heavily-built craft, most of them, and gay of color—began to make for the steamer; while on board there was a good deal of bustle among those preparing to go ashore. But we were never among the first of these; and so it chanced that Mrs. Threepenny-bit was idly gazing over the side, when her eye caught sight of something.

"Peggy," she called, "here are some visitors in one of the boats—is this your sister?"

Peggy came running.

"Oh, good gracious, it's the Baby!" she cried, in wild delight. "And these are the Vincents with her—how kind of them!—they have brought her over from Naples." And with that she waved her handkerchief frantically, and succeeded in arresting their attention, for there was an answering signal; and then she went quickly to the top of the accommodation-ladder; and probably she would even have descended the steps to meet them—disarranging all the traffic—but that the third officer, who was busily engaged in getting his boat-loads away, sternly refused to allow her. Well, not very sternly, perhaps. The fact is, it seemed to us that that young man never missed an opportunity of conversing with Peggy; and even now, while he was occupied *in packing off the* passengers, he found quite enough time to

AND WITH THAT SHE WAVED HER HANDKERCHIEF FRANTICALLY.

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chat with her. No, not at all sternly; for more than one waltz had she given him on those marvellous moonlit nights off the coast of Portugal, and many another he might reasonably hope to secure before we saw English land again. In truth, it was simply to talk to her that he detained her at the top of the ladder.

At last the way was clear; and here was the Baby—blushing furiously at the amount of attention bestowed on her—ascending the steps. And it was not until the two sisters had got through a considerable amount of hugging, and kissing, and laughing, and questioning, that we had a chance of seeing what "my sister Emily" was like. She was brought forward to us—and her friends accompanied her. Well, she was no rival to our peerless and incomparable Peggy—that was not to be expected; but she was a good-looking lass none the less—ingenuous of aspect, and grave—timid also, though that may have been because of her suddenly finding herself among strangers. She was not so fair as Peggy, nor so slender either; she promised to be of the Amazon type; but yet there was something very winning about her shy ways, and her self-consciousness, and her modest desire to please. As for Peggy, she made no concealment as to the alteration in her own life likely to be caused by the arrival of this serious-eyed young maid; with a sigh of regret she relinquished her past privileges and freedom from restraint; there would be no more fun for her now, she said, since the Baby had come on board.

Well, we lazy folk did not care to go ashore this afternoon; Amélie Dumaresq had for once persuaded her mother to bestir herself; and those two and Wolfenberg—the faithful Wolfenberg—went away by themselves. The good friends with whom the Baby had been travelling were much interested in the ship; they spent a considerable time in exploring it; and in the end they were easily persuaded to stay to dinner. And on this evening it must be admitted that Palermo retrieved itself; it cast aside that look of a sad and bad and mad chromo-lithograph; it assumed dignity when the arid hills grew dark and solemn against the westering glow, and the lighthouses began to send their steady rays through the gathering dusk. Mystery—sentiment—the subtle, elusive, imaginative quality in landscape that is unapproachable by inferior or mechanical art—was now in the air, as "the sun *sank, and all the* ways were overshadowed." Then

minute points of fire began to appear here and there in the town like golden glowworms. And these again, as the night fell, were outshone by others of a very different color, the blue-white radiant stars of the electric lamps along the esplanade, that sent long, quivering reflections down on the smooth-heaving black water between us and the shore. Palermo was now brilliantly illuminated —a blaze of splendor; for there was a public *festa* in the gardens of the Villa Giulia, and that also helped. The whole dark surface of the sea was dancing and glittering with those will-o'-the-wisps of imaged lights.

Our new friends stayed late, chatting on deck; but when at length they decided to go, we took them along to the top of the accommodation-ladder, so that they should have the first chance of a boat returning to the shore. And just as we reached the gangway, who should appear but the Dumaresqs, mother and daughter, Amélie Dumaresq being in a very gay and laughing and vivacious mood. But it was not Wolfenberg alone who was their escort: the dull, orange-hued glow of the lamp showed us that there were two gentlemen following them upwards from that black gulf of water. And the fourth member of the party turned out to be Paul Hitrovo: we learned that he had been so kind as to accompany the two ladies, along with Wolfenberg, to the festival in the gardens of the Villa Giulia.

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## CHAPTER V

### A HOROSCOPE

As we make for the shore on this fair-shining morning there is a heavy ground-swell running in: long, smooth, unbroken, oily-green waves that lift the steam-launch high in air and seem to leave it suspended for a time, until it glides down again, spluttering and snorting and rolling, into the next great ocean-valley. The boat is filled with our good Orotanians; and there is quite a blaze of white costumes, for the sun promises to be fierce. Some, whom we hardly envy, are about to ride away up to the top of Monte Pellegrino—the vast brown slope behind the bay is already shimmering in the heat; others, of more modest ambition, mean

simply to wander about the shady thoroughfares of the city, studying the remains of Moorish architecture; as for our small party, we are bent on a pious pilgrimage to the distant Monreale among the hills. And who so proud as the Major on this auspicious morning—the Major, to whom we have handed over Lady Cameron and her sister? For what with the advent of the Baby, and what with Mrs. Dumaresq having again consigned her daughter to our care, it is obvious that we shall have to separate into two carriages as soon as we reach the shore; and who so competent to take command of one of these as our gallant, if elderly, soldier? Joyful, indeed, is the Major, and assiduous; Peggy looks demure, taking care not to meet the grave glances of her friends; while the Baby, serious, unconscious, regards in an impressed kind of way the great panoramic town and its background of mountains. Mrs. Threepenny-bit has declared herself quite charmed with the Baby. Her ingenuousness, she affirms, is as sweet and fresh and wholesome as the flowers in a cottage garden. There are no underhand ways about *her*. *Her* eyes never say two things at once. *She* wouldn't sit in corners, and speak low, and ignore a whole roomful of people for the sake of one. And so forth. It is curious to notice how envy crops up on the most unexpected occasions.

But, as it chanced, a sad fate befell the Major after all. On landing at the mole, we found ourselves surrounded by a wildly-gesticulatory crowd of drivers and would-be guides; there was nothing for it but to push through these, unheeding, and take forcible possession of the nearest vehicle, Miss Dumaresq being pulled in by Mrs. Threepenny-bit with much adroitness. Then we turned to see how the Major and his charges were getting on. Well, he had secured a carriage, and he had got the two ladies safely deposited therein; and doubtless he was about to join them, when at this very moment the Passionate Poetess came up, carrying Phaon in her arms. The clamor of this crowd of unwashed Sicilians prevented our hearing what she said; but what took place was clear enough. Sappho was appealing to Lady Cameron to let her have the vacant seat in the carriage; and at once Peggy—who is the soul of good nature—smilingly assented; while the Baby politely changed over to the other side. Then we saw the Major compelled to assist his deadly enemy to her place, and not only *that, but he had to* shove Phaon along before he

could himself follow. *Avanti!* And when Amélie Dumaresq's face appeared again from behind her sunshade, she was wiping away the tears from her eyes. She had been outrageously, and wickedly, and cruelly laughing.

And very merry and light-hearted was she as we drove away through the town and out into the open and ever-ascending country. Wolfenberg smiled in a calmly tolerant fashion. It was no business of his to play the part of tutor; nay, he was always glad when he saw her amused or amusing others. And yet it must be said for this young lady that, however careless she might seem of her surroundings, there was very little escaped her sharp and observant eyes. She might be laughing and telling stories of her fellow-students at the Atelier Didron, but her glance took note of one object after another—a Moorish-looking building, a gayly-decorated cart, a horse staggering along under an enormous load, and suffering from hideous sores (though nobody is likely to miss *that* familiar feature of a Sicilian highway). And at last she said,

"Ernest, when my little exhibition is opened in London, I must send an invitation to Papa Didron. Do you think he will come over? Well, I fear not; he is too busy. But he must know of my great importance."

"I will take care of that, Amélie," said Wolfenberg, who not only invariably talked as though this constant companionship between herself and him was to last through all the years of their life, but also, in this particular instance, as though he were going to act the part of showman for her. "I will make sure of that. For one thing, I must get to know the London correspondents of the Paris papers; they may be interested; they ought to notice the pictures. Why, it is a piece of news. And then you are a daughter of France as far as art is concerned."

"Oh, listen to him!" she said to Mrs. Threepenny-bit, in simulated horror.

"I don't mean as regards landscape," he interposed, good-naturedly. "I know your heretical opinion of French landscape—"

"French landscape!" she said, in open disdain—"French landscape is landscape seen by limelight; all very effective, no doubt, in spinach-green, and cold grey, and black; but where is *the luminosity*, where is the sunlight, where is the throbbing air?

And yet how can you wonder?" she went on, apparently for the mere amusement of the thing—for her vehemence seemed a little bit assumed. "What are the poor men to do? God made the world out of nothing; but French artists are not quite so clever—they can't make landscapes out of those monotonous and treeless wastes; and so they construct effective studies of light and shade—limelight and false shade. And England is just as bad in the opposite direction. England is too conventionally picturesque. The mist gives you the atmospheric values all ready-made to hand. The clouds are low down, and come easily into the picture; distances are arranged for you; and then the country is all broken up with hedges, and coppices, and small fields, and farms—everything you could wish. Now, at home—in America, I mean—you have to wrestle with your subject—you have got to face it—the light is clear and hard—there is no compromise."

"There never is any compromise about you, Amélie," Wolfenberg said, laughing. "But if you wish to see throbbing air and luminosity, just you get up in the carriage and look back."

For by this time the patient horses had dragged us away up towards La Rocca; and when we rose to regard the landscape that now stretched out far below us, we beheld the famous Conca d' Oro, that immense and fertile valley filled with the fresh deep green of orange groves and lemon groves, with the dusky heights of Monte Grifone rising on the right, while in front, and away beyond the partly-hidden city, the vast breadth of pale blue sea trembled through the heat.

"I must get down," she said; "there is more freedom to look about when you are walking."

And, indeed, our slim-built and energetic Peggy had already descended from the other vehicle; and so had the Baby; and so had their gallant escort; Sappho and the pug remaining in sole possession of the carriage. And thus the re-united party went forward together, leisurely climbing the white and dusty road; our goal, the Fiesole-like Monreale, perched high on a hill, being now within view. Hot it was. The Major began to murmur hints about a *trattore*, and about a bottle of something combined with seltzer. The arid rock by the wayside had been hewn into small terraces by the cactus-growers, and the prickly pears had borrowed a charming tinge of color from the sun; but the one or two we *tried afforded* us no kind of satisfaction. The

only cool thing visible was the fresh green of the great valley: it was pleasant to let the eyes wander down towards those far-stretching, dense, luxuriant orange groves.

When at length we had toiled up to the queer, deserted-looking little town, we made straight for the Duomo, which, in truth, was the only thing we had come to see. But on entering the square, we perceived that we were not the first of the Orotanians: Paul Hitrovo and a companion, whose acquaintance he had made on board, were standing on the pavement just outside the Cathedral, the former smoking a cigarette.

"Well, that is a surprise!—I wonder if he has sat up all night?" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, who had never been too favorably disposed towards this young man, despite his achievement of fascinating the small Algerian. "Major," she continued in an undertone, "everybody gets to hear everything about everybody else on board ship. Who *is* that Mr. Hitrovo?"

"Gad, I don't know," said the Major, contentedly. "You'd better ask the young ladies; they seem mostly interested in him."

"The common gossip," put in Wolfenberg, with a certain quiet indifference, "is that he is of a very good Russian family. Lives in Vienna, mostly; and belongs to the sporting circles there. He told me himself that he had won the Prix de Consolation at Monte Carlo last year—pigeon-shooting."

"But what could have induced him to take a voyage like this—without knowing a single soul on board, apparently?" she demanded again.

"That I cannot say," he made answer. "Sheer idleness comes as a relief sometimes—but not often, to one of his age."

As they spoke, Amélie Dumaresq had glanced from the one to the other, quickly and furtively, but she said no word; indeed she could not; for now we were approaching the great doors of the Cathedral, and here were Hitrovo and his fellow-Orotanian raising their hats as the ladies went by. The next moment we were in a still and hushed twilight, with a soft sound of shuffling footsteps audible in the motionless air.

And presently we also were prowling about in this stealthy and silent fashion, regarding the massive columns and porphyry pillars, the bronze doors, the arabesques, the Biblical stories writ large in mosaic, the dull golden glow of the roof. But in walking about in this fashion, little groups get separated, commingle, separate again,

so that the presence or absence of any one person is hardly noticed. Thus it was that when we came to leave the building, we discovered that Amélie Dumaresq was not with us: even Wolfenberg had not observed her withdrawal—he had been so much interested in this architectural treasure-house.

But almost directly we discovered whither she had gone. She was standing just outside the door of the Cathedral, sketch-book in hand, making a study, or pretending to do so, of a withered little old man, who was sweeping the pavement. She was not alone. Paul Hitrovo was standing by her, not overlooking her work, but talking to her, while there was some amusement visible in her face. They formed quite a charming group, these two young people: he, slender and elegant, with a certain careless grace of attitude and manner, perhaps a little conscious of his good looks—of his soft and silken brown hair, his small and neatly-waxed moustache, and his extraordinary blue-grey eyes; she, of a more southern type, the long black lashes downcast as her glance came back from her model to her book, her manner almost shy, the exquisitely-formed lips smiling a little, her ungloved hands, small and plump and warm and white, looking somehow as if, were you to touch them, there would be a sudden shock, so full of vitality they seemed. She was not working very industriously; she was listening, rather; and she was pleased and amused. A very pretty group, indeed, they formed—in the cool shadow of the Cathedral, with the sunlit square beyond.

Wolfenberg hung back, as though he would rather not interrupt her; but the rattling forward of our carriage attracted her attention, and at the same time she became aware that we were awaiting her good pleasure. She snapped the book to at once.

"Well," said she, brightly, as she took her place in the carriage, "have you all of you worshipped sufficiently at the shrine of St. Gew-Gaw?"

"I feared you would not be impressed, Amélie," Wolfenberg said, as we drove away: the young Russian stood looking after us for a moment or two, then he turned to his companion: they seemed in no hurry to leave this little town on the top of the hill.

"Impressed?" Miss Dumaresq said, almost petulantly. "I was glad to get out into the honest daylight. I cannot understand making a place of worship a show-house, and imposing on you with sham decoration. Now, when you go into a Gothic cathe-

dral like Strasburg or Cologne, you feel at once that there is something about it noble, and simple, and solemn, and reticent; but all that rococo Byzantine splendor—and the tawdry magnificence of the Renaissance churches—is to me insufferably sickening. Then if you come to those crude, stupid pictures in mosaic: I dare say they may be historically interesting; but you know very well, Ernest, that as Art they are mere monstrosities. But, above all, I hate to be treated like a child—I hate to be cheated—"

Wolfenberg (who seemed to have been a little serious as we came away from the Cathedral) now turned to the small woman who was in charge of us all; and there was a grave and good-humored smile on his face.

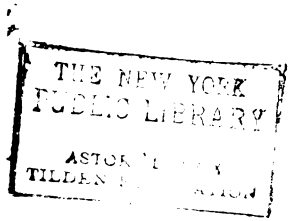
"Won't you interpose?" he said. "There is one point on which Amélie and I never agree; and I can see she is coming to it. I think St. Mark's at Venice the most beautiful thing in the world. She thinks—what do you think, Amélie?"

Well, Miss Iconoclast had the courage of her convictions.

"St. Mark's in Venice," said she, calmly—"Mr. Wolfenberg knows what I think of it. It seems to me nothing but an enormous sham—a pretence—pretty enough no doubt, but a gigantic mass of deception. There is not an ounce of solid reverent work in the whole place; it is all veneer; it pretends to be a marble building, whereas it is in reality a brick building faced with marble; and now that the thin slices are beginning to crack and fall off, the truth is being revealed. Trickery," she went on, more vehemently, "is bad enough everywhere; but in a temple it is particularly out of place. I don't wonder there are winking Virgins when the church is turned into a theatre to deceive people." But here she suddenly stopped, with a very pretty, and childish, and shamefaced little laugh. "Ernest," she said, affecting to be angry, "why did you lead me on to speak of St. Mark's at Venice?"

"Why?" he answered her, with his usual gentleness and indulgence. "Because our friends here must have learned by this time that ordinarily and almost always you have a singularly accurate and unbiassed mind, with clear perception, and frank judgment; and I wished them to see that all the same you could be as wildly unreasonable and prejudiced as any woman that ever breathed. I wanted to show that you were human, Amélie."

SHE WAS STANDING JUST OUTSIDE THE CATHEDRAL DOOR, SKETCH-BOOK IN HAND, WITH PAUL HITROVO.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"Ah, you say that because you cannot defend veneer," she retorted, but she was laughing now, and in a fine good-humor, and happy with herself and her surroundings. "That is your only answer. Well, we must agree to differ. And as St. Mark's is all tumbling into the mud, it's of very little consequence."

Then we drove away down into the valley, and through abundant orange groves, until we reached the gates leading to the Villa Tasca; and there, leaving both carriages without, we entered the spacious grounds that, in the absence of the beneficent proprietor, are thrown open to the public. And here, amid all the luxuriance of tropical foliage, amid the bewildering masses of color, and the statues, and miniature lakes and fountains, it was quite delightful to see how the nature of this child of the south seemed to expand, as she drank in the hot, spice-perfumed air. She was talking to every one at once; she was trying to catch the swift-darting lizards; she uttered little exclamations of joyous surprise when opening vistas revealed still further splendors of deep rose-red or flaming scarlet. Peggy, on the other hand, walked sedate and observant, listening civilly and sweetly to the ever-attentive Major. The tall Juno-eyed Baby looked so grave and majestic that we were almost ashamed of ourselves for heeding these idle things of the hour. There appeared to be no other visitors in these beautiful gardens. Sappho and her pug had stayed in the carriage; she preferred to await us there; and we had only to recall the derivation of the word cynosure to determine what occupied her undivided and admiring regard.

When we got back to the town, it seemed to be the universal wish of the women-folk to remain loitering about the sultry streets, for the reason that it would be some time before they got another opportunity of shopping; so—being of no manner of use to them, but rather in the way, indeed—we left them, under charge of the Major; and returned to the ship, and to the welcome shade of the awning. And thus it was that one happened to obtain a fuller knowledge of the peculiar relations that existed between Wolfenberg and Amélie Dumaresq; for here, on the deck of the deserted vessel, there were silence and privacy; and then, so careful was he of the smallest things that might affect her in the estimation of others, he seemed to fancy that some kind of apology was needful for her harsh treatment of St. Mark's.

"Downright honesty is her constant aim," he said, in his absent way, as if he were contemplating some creature of his imagination, before actually fixing it down with strokes of carbon. "She scorns pretence of any kind; and she has the courage to say what she thinks. . . . I suppose some people might find her character repellent. To me it is most attractive. But even if they found her repellent, they could not say she was uninteresting. She is too much of a living and breathing human being for that; she shows you too much of her personality; she may startle you and offend you, but at least you must be interested in her. . . ."

There was no response. Perhaps he did not expect any. At all events, he continued in the same preoccupied way, almost as if he were talking to himself:

"Her mind is downright, accurate, uncompromising; she cannot tolerate illusions. And that is why I sometimes think it is impossible she can ever become possessed by the greatest and most terrible of all illusions—the idealism of love. I do not think that will ever happen to her. She sees too clearly. . . . She would probably despise that idealization and treat it as mere sentiment. . . . And there again she would be wrong. It is a tremendous force; the most powerful thing in the world—and the most destructive. The delirium of love: it is as intangible as frost; but it can do more than merely split up rocks and cliffs: it has split up empires—and ruined millions of men's lives. . . . Some people seem even to doubt its existence. . . . Exists? You may be sure that Mother Nature takes care that it exists. She is cunning enough for that. Why does she give a crimson tinge to the rose-petal? Why does she fill a young man's head with ideals of maidenly beauty and perfection, and persuade him that a rather commonplace young woman entirely corresponds to these, or even exceeds them? . . . Of course, he finds out in time. The wonderful angel is revealed to him as an ordinary creature of clay. But meanwhile Mother Nature has got *her* part done; she has succeeded in *her* aim: the race is perpetuated. Whatever tragedy of disenchantment or repulsion may follow is no business of hers."

And here again one could say nothing, knowing the dark background there was to this man's life.

"No," he continued, "I do not think that Amélie Dumaresq

could ever become the slave of a great passion. Her intelligence is too penetrating. Her mind is acute, accurate, observant—"

"She is a woman."

"She is an artist. That way lies her ambition. Her interests are centred there. Her plans of life have already been formed, and not without sufficient and earnest study. . . . Sometimes, indeed, I think you do not understand her yet. Probably you do not; it is hardly to be expected. You see her merry, laughing, childish, pleased with trifles. And that is all honest, mind you, absolutely honest: it is simply that she so completely and wholly enjoys every moment of living: to breathe the air—to look at a flower—to listen to a waltz—everything has a fascination for her. But that is only on the surface. Her nature is deeper and stronger than that. She is an artist; she has serious aims; this butterfly existence is pretty enough—and I for one am delighted to look on when she is in her gayest and most frivolous moods; but that is not Amélie Dumaresq. Her mother could tell you differently. Her mother could tell you of this girl sitting up till four in the morning, in the dead of winter, in front of a fire that had gone out, dreaming and thinking of her work, her fingers almost frozen to the crayon, and yet hardly more than a suggestion or two put down on paper. For you must understand this: she is capable of idealization; only it is not the idealization that would bewilder her senses and blind her in her choice of a husband, should such a thing ever happen, as I think it will not; it is the idealization that lends charm to the commonest objects she finds suited to her art. And it comes back to that: she has chosen her path in life, and nature has given her the means to follow it. Amélie Dumaresq is an artist—*au bout des ongles.*"

This he said, and a great deal more to the same effect, as he paced up and down the deck, sometimes looking across the water to the great bulk of Monte Pellegrino, that was now growing sombre in the warm evening light. And one could not avoid the suspicion that in these disjointed sentences—more disjointed than they are set down here—he was covertly seeking to persuade himself. His study of this girl's nature and character was, no doubt, the result of long observation; and he had got the outlines firm enough; only he seemed anxious to convince you—or to convince himself—that there could be nothing beyond and behind, that there were no other contingencies to be reckoned with. She was

heart and soul an artist. She had with deliberation and foresight chosen her way of life. Her clear intellect, her uncompromising quest of truth, her scorn of unreality, were all safeguards against the illusions which might come in to disturb or destroy a woman's existence. He had forced himself to mention the possibility of her marriage, but only to dismiss it as unworthy of consideration. Amélie Dumaresq's position was defined; he knew her, and could answer for her inmost thoughts; her future he and she had planned together.

The evening waned, and still these women did not return. The vast amphitheatre of hills grew to be of a soft, deep rose-purple under the pale lemon-hued sky; and in the cool, gray twilight of the town one or two golden points had appeared just above the darkening sea. What had come over them? Mrs. Dumaresq was restless, and perturbed, and fretful. Not that she was apprehensive about her daughter's safety, but that it was close on the dinner-hour, and Amélie would not have time to change her dress.

"Come, let us go ashore and discover what has happened," Wolfenberg said.

But even as he spoke the steam-launch was seen to come round the point of the distant breakwater; and presently we could make out, even in this gathering dusk, that there were light-hued costumes on board. Nay, before the boat came alongside, it looked as though these people had armed themselves for some *Bataille des Fleurs* on the morrow, such a profusion of bouquets and baskets of flowers had they among them. Nor were they without abundant escort; for, besides the Major, they appeared to have picked up Paul Hitrovo and his companion; and the three gentlemen were all equally zealous in handing and carrying parcels and packages, while the women-folk managed their enormous bouquets as best they could.

Amélie Dumaresq was the first to arrive at the top of the gangway, breathless, laughing, her lips parted, her black eyes bright with excitement and pleasure.

"Oh, Ernest, how lazy of you!" she exclaimed. "Why, we have been everywhere, and seen everything!" Then she turned to her neighbor, who was the young Russian. "Here, Mr. Hitrovo, will you please take these flowers down to the saloon, and ask a steward to get some water for them, and put them on our table? *Oh, thank you!*"

She took from him the parcels he had been holding for her; and the dinner-bell had already begun to tinkle in the forward part of the ship when she hurried away to make some hasty alterations in her attire.

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## CHAPTER VI

### "VIX E CONSPECTU SICULÆ TELLURIS"

THE new day has not yet come; nevertheless, we seem to have emerged from the night—it lies behind us low and sullen along the west; while the great ship, laboring onwards through this mysterious twilight, has over its foretopmast the silver crescent of the moon, as if we were bearing with us, into the East, the symbol of the East. In the north are the Æolian islands—Volcano, Lipari, and their lonely neighbors; but they also are dark and overshadowed; Vulcan and his Cyclopes have not yet lit their forges; from those distant conical peaks arises no wavering tongue of pink, no column of lurid smoke. But, all the same, light is coming; the never-failing, never-familiar wonders of the dawn are near. As one regards this livid and slaty-black sea, here and there a liquid crest is touched with a dull saffron; ahead of us the dim coast-line—a mere film of land along the horizon—gradually becomes of a transparent olive-green; and above that again the sky is a glow of ruddy gold that is rendered all the more intense by one long, far-stretching cloud of the deepest and softest violet, its warm, rich tones of an indescribable beauty. The overarching heavens are now of a lambent, tremulous silver-grey: the sickle of the moon still reigns placidly there. Swiftly and silently the morning splendor spreads and grows; the great violet cloud has turned to an exquisite rose-purple, with fringes of crimson fire; then, of a sudden, over the rim of the land, appears the blinding edge of the sun; a shiver of light seems to spring through the sleeping world; and as one turns to see what bewildering miracle has been wrought, behold! far away over there in the south the pale snows of Etna have already answered to the flame.

And here, up at the bow of the vessel, a group of early risers have clustered together, some idly chattering, others gazing abroad on the new world of sea and sky and ever-approaching land. Wolfenberg stands somewhat apart, silent and alone, apparently plunged in a profound reverie. Amélie Dumaresq, with her laughing and lustrous black eyes full of interest, is listening to the tall young Russian, who, in his turn, seems trying, lazily and smilingly, to amuse her. The rotund and roseate Major has got hold of a plateful of biscuits, and is bustling about with these, perhaps unconsciously selecting the prettiest of the young women for his favors. But who is it who forms the principal, the most attractive, feature of this miscellaneous throng—who but our shining-eyed, and peerless, and radiant Peggy? As usual, Peggy has climbed to a commanding post; her upstretched right arm, holding on to the foretopmast-stay, reveals to fine advantage her slender and elegant figure; the simple, tight-fitting gray dress looks well against the pale blue of the sky; she has no covering on her head, so that the sunlight makes a wonder of her neatly-plaited, light-brown hair. And as for her face?—well, she appears to be entirely happy and content with herself, as if she were ready to smile if her regard met any one; but she is not heeding those around her; she is looking away across the flashing and surging waves to the transparent line of coast. Many and many a ship, in all ages of the world, has sailed these well-known waters, but never one of them with such a glorified figure at the prow.

And was not this a grand and notable day for the Passionate Poetess? She was so breathlessly excited, so busy with her dog's-eared translations and her Lemprière, that she had not yet found time to pay her morning call on the butcher, to fetch her beloved Phaon. For were not these now receding peaks the mysterious abode of the Ruler of the Winds? She had got hold of the *hic vasto rex Æolus antro* passage; and as she marched up and down the deck, we could hear her repeating to herself some high-sounding lines—

*Luctantes ventos, tempestatesque sonoras,*

or,

*Illi indignantes magno cum murmure montis,*

or the like. And was she not following in the wake of her

favorite Ulysses? Ahead of us were Scylla and Charybdis, and Cape Pelorum, and the famous Straits along which every hamlet and town and river recalls some old-world legend or some tragic historical event. At the same time, it was not all joy for Sappho. The discrepancies she found in those various authors, even in such minor matters as spelling, chafed her spirit; and her indignant protests, accompanied even by a little show of ill-temper, were addressed indiscriminately to any one who would listen—even to the Major, poor man! who solemnly assured her that he had not construed a single verse of Greek or Latin since he left school.

"It's their horrible inconsistencies!" she exclaimed; and at times she appeared almost ready to take refuge in tears. "One book tells you that the Cyclopes lived on the coast of Libya, and another says the west of Sicily, and another under Mount Etna. As for the island of the Sirens, they seem to put it just wherever they like; but I suppose it really must have been over by Cape Pelorus, since Ulysses, after getting past it, came immediately on Scylla and Charubdis. Scylla and Charybdis!" she went on, bitterly, for here was another grievance. "Oh, no, not at all—not at all! Skūllè and Charubdis! Skūllè! what *is* the use of such tomfoolery! And Kirke, and Kalūpso, and the Kuklopes! And I'd like to know how they ever got Odysseus changed into Ulysses; and more than that, when they had got it changed, and accepted by all the world, what good is there in going back, not to Odysseus, but to Odūsseus? It is such preposterous folly!"

Yet worse, far worse, remained behind: something calculated to strike dismay into the stoutest heart. For at this moment the Baby came up, carrying a binocular glass in her hand; and, with shy good-nature, she said,

"Would you like my glass, Miss Penguin? They say that rock over there is Scylla."

"Scylla?" said Sappho, with something of a start—for indeed the tall gray rock was visible to the naked eye. "That Scylla? There must be some mistake! For in the Odyssey it says that the rock reaches to the heavens, and has perpetual clouds on the top of it. And—and Charybdis?"

Instinctively she turned to look at the other shore—perhaps with a dreadful doubt possessing her. Well, what she saw was simply *this: a breadth of calm blue* sea, shimmering in the sun-

light, with the slightest of ripples; and beyond that a very pleasant and smiling coast-line, with strips of yellow-gray villages, and over these a series of vineyard-terraced hills. But as for Scylla the awful monster?—and divine Charybdis sucking in black water thrice a day, and sending it out again, and defying even the dread might of Poseidon? Sappho was silent: she would not confess to the terrible fear that she had been beguiled. And when one pointed out to her that in stormy weather the narrow entrance into these Straits of Messina might be quite dangerous enough for any small sailing-vessel, she still remained silent. And then she went away to ask for Phaon.

However, any doubts about the literal trustworthiness of Homer that might have clouded her mind for a moment would seem to have been soon forgotten; for some little time thereafter Peggy came along in a very secret and solemn manner, and intimated that she had a matter of importance to communicate.

"It's a poem," said Peggy.

"What about?"

"Ulysses passing the island of the Sirens. Oh, I assure you, it is tremendous. Do you know what Sappho herself says?—she says, 'Fling a few burning words into the air: they are more than all the philosophies: they will sound in the hearts of men through the ages.'"

"Has she flung them?"

"I have them in my pocket."

"Let me see them."

But here Peggy hesitates, and looks round.

"The Baby is over there," she says, with an uneasy glance, "and she always insists that it is very wrong to have secrets. It is undignified. If she saw me handing you this paper, and waiting for you to read it, she would be shocked. That's what it is to have a severe and superior being for a sister—even though she's not long out of school—"

"Oh, nonsense—"

"I'll tell you what I will do: I will get an envelope, and enclose the poem, and leave it for you in the Purser's office: then you can go for it and read the verses at your leisure."

"Sweet simplicity—that would be a pretty stratagem for the Baby to discover! What?—is your guilty soul so sensitive that *you cannot take* a bit of poetry out of your pocket and show it

in open daylight? What have you been doing? Have you been bewildering the Major?"

"Oh, let the Major alone—as I do!" she says. "Suppose we go and sit down by the wheel-box: then you need not be interrupted."

And thus it is that one becomes possessed, temporarily, of the following burning words—which are hereby flung into the air. Whether they will sound through the ages it is obviously not for the present transitory race of men to determine.

*Brothers, I hear the Siren sing,*
*Where by Pelorus the white waves spring:*
*My pulses raven, my senses swirl—*
*O could I clutch thee, goddess or girl!*

*Unbind me, ye fools, that made me fast,*
*Ere with my sinews I break the mast!*
*Astarte, Astarte, grant me breath!*
*Astarte, Astarte, help or death!*

*Slaves and dotards, why stand ye there?*
*The music swims through the shivering air:*
*Curses upon ye, unbind these arms!—*
*What know ye of love's fierce hurts and harms?*

*Pale Penelope, fare you well—*
*We meet no more upon this side Hell:*
*Farewell to the shining Cyclades—*
*I end my life in the Sirens' seas.*

*Nay, loose me, ye fools, that bound me fast,*
*Ere with my sinews I break the mast!*
*Astarte, Astarte, grant me breath!—*
*Astarte, Astarte, love or death!*

"Well?" says Peggy.

"Her geography seems a little shaky: does she imagine that Ithaca is among the shining Cyclades?"

"Oh, how mean! Now that is just like a critic! You take exception to a quite unimportant detail, and miss all the fiery spirit of the piece itself!"

"There is plenty of fiery spirit, no doubt: double-distilled fusel-oil is a fool to it. What are you going to do with the trash?"

"Yes, I always did think men were more envious than women," Peggy *says, rather sadly, as she* takes the shred of manuscript and

folds it up, and returns it to her pocket. "Because you can't do a certain thing yourself you needn't belittle it when it is done by some one else. And, after all, she is only acting up to her own contention—that there should be more passion in modern poetry. . . . Well, now, I can get away without the Baby suspecting any secret confabulation. Good-bye for the present."

This was a pleasant morning we had for our leisurely sail along the eastern coast of Sicily—a Rhine-looking country, with ruddy-grey hills sprinkled with green; here and there a yellow-white village extending along the shore; an occasional ruined tower perched high on a pinnacle of rock, overlooking the glassy water. Then as we got further to the south the vast domain of Etna began to declare itself; the great mountain visible from sea-base to summit; on the lower slopes innumerable houses like grains of sand shining among the dark foliage of the orange groves; the higher slopes ruddy and scarred; the far-receding cone sprinkled with snow. Almost too majestic a background, perhaps, for the trivial human interests that were being interwoven on board this ship? Yet these had to be considered; in fact, they were thrust upon us.

For, first of all, Mrs. Dumaresq, seizing the favorable opportunity, came and sat down by the side of our Mrs. Threepenny-bit; and after a little anxious beating about the bush, began to speak about M. Paul Hitrovo, and to ask us what we knew of him. Well, we knew nothing of him, or next to nothing. But this elderly woman, with the sallow face, sad eyes, and braided silver-white hair, seemed concerned and perturbed; she said that every one must have observed the marked attention the young Russian was now paying to her daughter; and she lamented that Amélie was so wilful and self-confident that it was of no use to speak to her or to caution her.

"The only one she might heed would be Mr. Wolfenberg," said the distressed mother. "But how is it possible to speak to him about so delicate a matter? Of course he has noticed. I have seen him look at them. But then he is very proud; he would not claim anything on account of the great friendship that has existed for so long between Amélie and himself; he would rather stand aside, and leave her to do as she pleases. Of course I say nothing against Mr. Hitrovo, for I know nothing; and—and they say he is very well connected; but it would be dreadful if Amélie

READING THE POEM.

"It would only pain him unnecessarily, and he is so sensitive, especially where Amélie is concerned. Well, I had hoped for other things from this voyage." And the poor woman left with a sigh —stealing away guiltily, as it were; though it was only a nervous apprehension and anxiety about her daughter's happiness that had driven her to this timid confession and appeal.

Our next experience on this eventful morning was of a more cheerful cast. We discovered that we had got a stranger on board. Now, when we left Tilbury the great majority of the Orotanians were entirely unacquainted with each other; but this constant association, day after day, had so familiarized us with each other's appearance that the sudden advent of an unknown person seemed a startling thing. Not that there was anything alarming or forbidding about the newcomer; on the contrary, his air and manner were most prepossessing; and if his costume struck us as strange—it was clearly a land-travelling costume—perhaps that was merely because he had not yet had time to open his sea-kit. He was a young fellow of about two-and-twenty, quite boyish in look, fresh-complexioned, with hardly the semblance of a moustache, and with such an expression of modest ingenuousness as at once bespoke favor. We first noticed him at breakfast-time. Now on board the *Orotania* it was only at dinner that fixed places were kept; at breakfast and lunch any one coming into the saloon took any seat that happened to be vacant, just as is done at a club. When this English-looking lad appeared at the door of the saloon, he glanced round with quite a pretty shyness. There did chance to be one vacant chair at our table; and it was near him; he made a faltering step towards it —hesitated—seemed to be overcome with diffidence and embarrassment—and then went on in vague quest of an empty corner. The odd thing was that this momentary hesitation on his part seemed to have had an instant and curious effect on the Baby—our serious and solemn-eyed and self-possessed Baby—who was now blushing furiously: she even looked frightened. But supposing he had actually sat down at the table, what cataclysm could possibly have ensued? On board our excellent *Orotania* ham and eggs are free to all: to each man his share, no one grudging. Nor could the Baby have complained of being taken unawares by a stranger; for as to the smallest details of her toilet she was al*ways and in*variably diligent and scrupulous at the earliest hour;

on this particular morning, long before we had come to terrible Scylla and the divine Charybdis, she had come up on deck dressed as if for an afternoon drive.

Thereafter, as we sailed along the Sicilian shores, the modest youth rather kept himself out of the way, though his 'landward' costume made him more or less conspicuous. He did not venture to speak to any of the passengers. Nor did he seem to care much about the coast we were passing; though surely such names as Taormina, Aci Reale, Catania, Mount Hybla, and Megara were calculated to awaken visions and dreams. And at length one or two of our more curious brethren made bold to go to the Purser, to demand information about the mysterious newcomer. His name? That, at least, could be ascertained — Julian Verrinder. What?—of the Verrinders of Devon? Mr. Purser was unable to say: all he knew was that the young man had telegraphed from Naples to the London office of the Company to see if he could have a cabin, and that he came on board the previous evening, at Palermo. What further? Why, nothing. Moreover, the young man, in holding aloof, kept away forward by the engines, walking up and down there, and seemingly not disposed to enter into conversation with any one. It is true that once or twice, when our attention happened to be withdrawn from that absorbingly interesting coast-line, it seemed to one of us that the young stranger sometimes threw a furtive and timid glance in our direction; but that may have been mere fancy; anyway, there was enough now ahead of us to occupy our eyes.

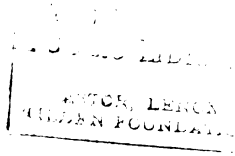
For here was a long spur of land coming out into the blue sea, covered with a white, flat-roofed, Eastern-looking town, and ending in a battlemented fort. This was Syracuse; rather, this was Ortygia; and the sheet of smooth green water opening out before us was the Great Harbor in which Athens met her doom. Now, callous as any one may be about the woes of Hecuba, it is surely impossible to sail into the Bay of Syracuse without recalling, with actual and vivid compassion and pity, the tremendous tragedy that was here enacted. Ordinary battle-fields are rarely impressive—are rarely intelligible. Their distinctive features are soon obliterated. The present writer, at all events, has never been able to make even a guess at what has happened on such and such a modern battle-field, unless, indeed, it chanced that certain heaps of dead bodies lying about, of men and horses, appeared to show

where a stand had been made against a charge of cavalry. But in the case of Syracuse and its wide harbor, all the necessary points are easy of indentification: nay, it seems as if it might have been only the other day that Etna, looking down from the north, beheld the overwhelming rout and slaughter of the environed Greeks, and heard the wild weeping and piteous exclamations of their companions along the shore, who knew that for them also remained nothing but the agony of a hopeless flight, and capture, and death. Yonder, at the other extremity of the horse-shoe bay, Cape Plemmyrium; here, at this nearer point, Ortygia; stretching away upward, the heights of Epipolæ, where, on that ghostly moonlight night, Demosthenes had almost recovered the desperate fortunes of his countrymen, when the very Gods seemed to intervene to drive them back to destruction; and finally, in front of us, between us and the shore, the placid sheet of shining green water—the scene of a still more awful fight—the last effort of the Athenian ships to break out of the chained and stockaded bay—the death-struggle that ended in the most tragic defeat, and the most cruel tale of prolonged and merciless suffering, known to history. The tears of Hecuba were shed long ago, and do not much concern us now; but not even the most trivial and careless of travellers can sail into the harbor of Syracuse without being in a measure overawed by the recollection of the stupendous overthrow of the great Athenian armaments. That which broke the power of Athens and ultimately wrought her ruin cannot easily be forgotten by the civilized world.

But all the same we were glad to find our good, dear, impetuous Sappho in a most eager and buoyant humor. She had got upon the track of Ulysses at last; indeed, she had pinned him into a corner; there was no further escape for him now. Hitherto the wanderings of the much-enduring hero had caused her infinite perplexity, nay, had even ruffled her temper in a way we were pained to witness; while the glosses and guesses of translators had only driven her to still direr distraction. But now she had narrowed the issues to a point; she had Ulysses by the throat, as it were.

"Look at this," said she, triumphantly, as she produced one of those volumes of Bohn that get so rapidly shabby on board ship. "When Ulysses escapes Scylla and Charybdis, he sails along the coast of the island until his companions persuade him to land;

THE YOUNG MAN KEPT FORWARD BY THE ENGINES.



and then he says, 'We stationed the well-made ship in the hollow port, near the sweet water.' Now, that *must* have been Syracuse —this very bay; and as for the sweet water, obviously it is the Fountain of Arethusa, over there behind the trees. Could anything be more accurate, more interesting? Isn't it strange that Homer should have known about that fountain of sweet water?" Indeed, she was overjoyed by this discovery; and went about proclaiming it; and we were quite pleased to see the venerable goddess so delighted.

But the mention of a fountain had fallen on Amélie Dumaresq's ear. She, like the rest of us, was in the forward part of the vessel, looking at those yellow houses and the green palms and oleanders, and waiting for the roar of the anchor. And she had been talking to Paul Hitrovo. But on hearing something said about a fountain, she turned suddenly to Wolfenberg, who was standing by, but a little way apart.

"Ernest," said she, in accents of gay reproach, as she went over to him, "it has just occurred to me: why have you told me nothing further about your picture? Have you forgotten it? Have you abandoned it? All these days, and not a word! You do not mean to say that we are to have no Fountain of Callirrhoe?"

The man with the pale, worn face, and the pensive and absent eyes, flushed a little; perhaps he did not care to have his work spoken of before strangers.

"These last few days?—I have not been thinking of it," he made answer, in the gentle tone he invariably adopted towards her; but at the same time he seemed rather to move away somewhat; and she, after a moment's surprise, returned to her Russian friend.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE EAR OF DIONYSIUS

Of a sudden all this was changed. Just as we were about to set out for the shore, Amélie Dumaresq was again consigned to our care; and as that necessitated the choice of a fourth to make up our driving-*party, Mrs. Threepenny*-bit promptly invited Wol-

fenberg to accompany us: she would have no Russian hanging about, with dangerous complications in the background. And so far from Amélie Dumaresq resenting this arrangement, she seemed to welcome it; and no sooner had we landed from the steam-launch, and got ourselves into the ramshackle vehicle that was to drive us round the environs of Syracuse, than it became obvious she was bent on pleasing and captivating all her companions, but especially Ernest Wolfenberg. Perhaps she was secretly conscious that she had of late neglected him; perhaps she had noticed him standing about the deck very much by himself; perhaps she had remarked that his stern, grave face appeared to be graver, his dreamy eyes more absent and wistful than was their wont. At all events, it looked as though she was now determined to make ample atonement. As we drove away from this sweltering harbor she was in the gayest and friendliest of good-humors. Her own content and gladness seemed to radiate from her; the clear Sicilian atmosphere lent animation to the pale olive hue of her satin-soft cheek; her liquid black eyes (as black as her magnificent blue-black hair) danced in audacious merriment; when that rosebud of a mouth smiled, even in wicked satire, it was difficult to deny sympathetic acquiescence. Moreover, she was merciful to us on this occasion. She did not frighten us out of our wits with startling paradoxes or ruthless iconoclasm. For her, she was quite moderately wilful, and petulant, and self-assertive. And when she spoke to Wolfenberg it was with a gentleness, and consideration, and even a subtle and insidious flattery that entirely merited approval.

And as for him? Well, it was in its way pathetic to see this man—so immeasurably her superior in intellectual and artistic endowments; so immeasurably her superior, also, in qualities of character—it was almost pathetic to see how grateful he was to her for this kindness and attention to him. Not that he betrayed his gratitude in any sentimental fashion; on the contrary, he kept laughing at her perversities and vagaries, and kept interposing here and there to make little explanations or apologies for her. Sometimes, indeed, a certain callousness on her part appeared to grate against his finer sense; but all the same he would defend her, or perhaps remonstrate with her in the most delicate fashion. For example, she was making merry, making rather maliciously merry, over our good, dear Sappho—over her appearance, her

dress, her pug, her passionate poetry, her Lemprière erudition, and what not; and she went on to declare that on this very morning she had heard Miss Penguin express the wish that she might get back from the fort of Eurya'-lus in time to take a boat and go up the An'-apus in order to get some leaves of the pap'-yrus. All through this Wolfenberg had looked rather uncomfortable. For if a woman has sandy hair, how can she help it? And a heavy and lethargic face may accompany a brilliant and penetrative mind. A dowdy dress does not necessarily indicate a cruel or envious disposition. As for errors in accentuation—

"Don't you think, Amélie," said Wolfenberg in his timidly suggestive way, "that where there is no pretence, the blunders of ignorance are very venial things?—don't you think they rather call for sympathy and silence? Eurya'-lus is a quite natural mistake."

"Look here, Ernest," said she, abruptly breaking away from the subject, for she did not like being reproved, even by him, "why don't you paint a portrait of Lady Cameron?—she is the beauty of the ship."

"Why don't you do it yourself, Amélie?" he suggested.

"Oh, I?" she said with a frank laugh. "I brutalize everything I touch. You would make a dream of it. This morning, at sunrise, when we were coming near to the Straits of Messina, did you notice her up at the bow—perched away above the rest of us as usual; and when the light came over from the east, her face seemed to me quite mystically beautiful. It was a vision; it was something for you, Ernest, I tell you. Of course that is a trick of hers, getting up high: she knows she has a fine figure. And swinging her Tam o' Shanter in her hand is another; she likes to be bare-headed, because her hair shows well in the sunlight. But I am not jealous; I don't bear malice; I love beautiful things, whether they are alive or merely marble. Only, what I say is, you ought not to lose the opportunity. If you don't wish to paint her portrait, at least make studies of her head: you will rarely meet with such a model. Why, you have not done a stroke of work since you left England!"

"Have you?" said he, with a smile.

"You must not talk like that," said she, a little proudly. "Your work and mine are not quite on the same plane—no, not quite! *My manufacture I can* turn out at any moment; and if I

have been idle, it has been because there was too much to look at, too much to interest. But I should not have expostulated with you, Ernest. I know how your work comes to you better than you do yourself. It is exactly what Shelley says about poetry: 'Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds' . . . 'evanescent visitations of thought and feeling' . . . 'arising unforeseen and departing unbidden.' Your work is inspiration; my daubs are mechanical—"

"Amélie!" said he—but whether he was protesting against her skilful flattery or against her self-depreciation we could not quite make out.

"Oh, do you think I don't know?" she exclaimed. "I tell you I understand how your work comes to you: it is a sudden fancy, and if you do not seize it and hold it, it is off again, and you care no more about it. Ernest, have you let the Fountain of Callirrhoe slip away like that?"

"I hardly know," he said, rather uneasily. "How can one tell? It was, as you say, a passing fancy; and when one is thinking of other things one forgets." He shifted the subject: he turned to our Mrs. Threepenny-bit (who would have been quite content to hear those two go on talking, with her own speculations making an inward commentary). "Do you notice how delicious a color green is, after we have come through long days of blinding blue and silver?" (For this dusty roadway we were driving along was bordered by an abundance of fresh vegetation —bananas, lemons, pomegranates, the latter showing their waxen fruit taking a tinge of crimson on their sunward side). "It is a kind of feast for the eyes: I did not know one's sight had grown so hungry. Yet blue and silver—Mediterranean blue and brilliant sunlight—are welcome enough at the time."

She did not answer him; for at this moment the driver drew up in front of a gate; and we were expected to descend. We discovered that this was the entrance to the waste land surrounding the ruins of the Roman Amphitheatre; and here we found one or two of our excellent Orotanians wandering about, picking up flowers, or gazing down at the remains of the ancient building and its adjuncts—the terraced stone seats, the alligator tanks, the massive cages for the wild beasts, all of which seemed as though they had been used but yesterday, so perfect were they. And this was not a gloomy spectacle like the Coliseum at Rome; this

was set amid fair lemon groves and verdant vineyards, all smiling in the warm afternoon sun.

Paul Hitrovo was here, along with his Monreale friend. He observed Miss Dumaresq come into these grounds, but made no motion of approach; she also threw a glance—one might almost say a furtive glance—in his direction, but affected to be entirely absorbed in conversation with her companion. Indeed, she was arm-in-arm with Mrs. Threepenny-bit; and was very affectionate; and was apologizing for having taken the place of Lady Cameron on these our landward excursions. And when we came away again she still clung in this familiar fashion to her chaperon, and had no eyes for any one else, save when she turned to address a friendly word to Wolfenberg from time to time; and in this manner, having ordered the carriage to follow, we went forward on foot towards our next objective point—the so-called Ear of Dionysius.

We left the road, and went along a deep-descending wooded dell. We found in front of us a lofty mass of rock, thick-hanging with ivy. We entered by a wooden door in a low stone wall; and then the mysterious twilight told us we were in a vast cave, the further recesses of which, as well as the vault overhead, were invisible in the impenetrable gloom. And what was this strange 'swish!—swish!' we heard all around, and above, and far beyond? —what but our own foot-steps! We discovered that the faintest sound we could make—the light snapping of one's fingers, the rustling of a piece of paper—was carried away from us, and repeated again and again in the distant and obscure unknown; while the door behind us, when it was slammed to by the military custodian, sent thundering reverberations that seemed to plunge howling and rolling into the very bowels of the earth. And who were these who now approached us, coming out of the opaque darkness into the trembling, uncertain light? The roseate and beaming Major—our gracious and smiling Lady of Inverfask—the tall, grave, goddess-eyed Baby: it was a welcome meeting.

"This place seems full of ghosts," said Peggy, in an awe-stricken way. "If you speak to any one, they whisper all round you."

"Gad," said the Major, "I should not like to have been one of the prisoners shut up here by that old tyrant. Precious little sleep for them, *I should think*. Now let us go outside and get

away up to the gallery where he used to sit and listen and discover their secrets."

But we late comers did not mean to lose so invaluable a guide; for the Major had been in Sicily and in Syracuse oftentimes before; so we attached our party to his, and together we passed out into the warmer air. On our way up to the road again, Wolfenberg gathered a few fronds of maidenhair fern, and offered them to Amélie Dumaresq. She accepted them, and looked pleased. The old comradeship seemed to be re-established between those two.

Now, to reach the little gallery and chamber which legend maintains Dionysius had constructed so that, by the curious acoustic properties of this immense cavern, he might overhear his prisoners talking, you have to climb away up to the top of the Greek Theatre—an imposing ruin, of far greater extent than the Roman Amphitheatre. And when we came in sight of that far-stretching, far-rising, yellow-grey pile of horse-shoe terraced stone seats, about the first thing we noticed was two figures making for the summit. Very small they looked in that great space; but by their white costumes and puggarees we knew them to be Orotanians; and the next moment we had recognized them—they were the young Russian and his companion. Well, why not? Had they not as much right to go sight-seeing as anybody? Nay, had they not even seemed to avoid us, by coming past the cave without seeking to enter?

But when we had clambered up these century-worn tiers, and crossed a space of gritty ground and spiky weeds, and come to an opening cut into the rock leading to the higher end of the cavern, we found that M. Hitrovo had not the least wish to avoid us. On the contrary, he rather left his companion, and came forward, and spoke pleasantly and carelessly to this one and that, eventually, however, addressing himself exclusively to Amélie Dumaresq. And, oddly enough, he invariably seemed to have the power of drawing her away from her friends—if only for a yard or so—so that he and she could speak together. Yet there was no affectation of secrecy; not at all. She appeared to find him amusing. She would look up at him with her eyes full of smiles. As for him, he did not seem to take too much trouble about her. He rather patronized her. But he had a pretty laugh; and his *eyes—yes, it* could not be denied that those blue-grey eyes were

singularly clear, that they were full of light, and that they might possibly have a bewildering effect on a young woman become curious and interested.

At this moment Peggy came back from that opening into the rock.

"What we should have done," said she, "was for one of us to have remained in the cavern. Here we can talk into the roof of the place, but there is no one to answer us from below."

"Oh, I will go down if you like," said Paul Hitrovo at once. "What do you say, Miss Dumaresq? Shall we go down and listen to them and answer them?"

"Oh, yes, yes, by all means," said she, cheerfully; and the next moment those two were making their way down the successive stone ridges of this great theatre, in the direction of the distant road, and the aqueduct, and the chasm leading to the echoing cave. It was all the work of an instant. How was any one to interfere? Or was Amélie Dumaresq the kind of person to brook interference?

But Mrs. Threepenny-bit, whose attention had been drawn away at the moment, was most angry and indignant when she discovered what had happened. Those two retreating figures had now reached the aqueduct; another second, and they had disappeared from sight.

"It is really too bad," she said, with frowning brows. "She is under my charge. She has no right to make off like that. If she has had her head turned—"

She stopped. Wolfenberg was standing by. But indeed he was not listening. There was a strange look on his features. His eyes were pre-occupied and thoughtful, but the eyebrows were drawn down somewhat; and the firm mouth that gave character to an otherwise wistful and pensive face betokened determination. Was he nerving himself to face something he had not hitherto contemplated? Or was he merely resolved to pay no heed to this little incident that had just occurred? Apparently, he was not looking after the fugitives—though he must have seen them disappear; his gaze, at once absent and inscrutable, was fixed on that fertile champaign country with its luxuriant lemon groves, and on the yellow-grey city perched on the point, with the far blue belt of sea beyond. He did not seem to wish to speak to any one. *He was alone with* himself—and we left him so.

What echo-borne conversation ensued between the little group in this small and lofty gallery and the two unseen people in the profound abyss below, we did not care to hear: for one thing, there was a cold wind coming whistling through that aperture sufficiently dangerous for folk who had been all day baked and boiled and blistered under a Sicilian sun. The remarkable circumstance was that Hitrovo and Amélie Dumaresq did not reappear—even after this experiment was long over. The carriages were in sight down by the aqueduct; but those two made no sign.

"We'd better go down," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, concealing her vexation very well indeed. "Most likely they are waiting for us, or perhaps they may have set out on foot for Syracuse without saying anything—young people are so inconsiderate."

However, when we had descended those massive steps, and when we had got into the road, and round by the aqueduct, we thought we might as well have a look at that winding chasm leading to the cave; and here, indeed, we found the two truants, strolling about, and apparently quite unconcerned. Amélie Dumaresq was carrying a nosegay of various wild flowers. No doubt they had been gathered for her by her companion. And the modest little tribute of maidenhair fern that Wolfenberg had presented her with? That was gone. Well, ferns wither soon; perhaps she had thrown them away. But an odd thing happened with regard to this new and more florid bouquet. The soldier in charge of the Orecchio di Dionisio had come along to bid us good-bye (perhaps with some ulterior views), and the moment he caught sight of the nosegay he said to her in his mangled and gutteral French:

"Mademoiselle, you have there some poisonous flowers; they will do injury to your hands. See, I will show you the bad ones."

For a second she did not quite catch his meaning; but when she did she saved him all the trouble of separation. She instantly flung the whole lot away with a gesture as if she had already been stung. For Miss Dumaresq, as we had noticed before now, had a pretty good idea of taking care of herself. As we drove away back to Syracuse, she repeatedly looked at the palm and fingers of her little plump white hand. And she had abundant opportunities of doing so; for Wolfenberg was unusually silent; when he spoke it was mostly to Mrs. Threepenny-*bit, as we sometimes* call her.

SHE INSTANTLY FLUNG THE WHOLE LOT AWAY WITH A GESTURE AS IF SHE HAD ALREADY BEEN STUNG.

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That night, after dinner, Amélie Dumaresq was entirely in her element. There was music on the Marina; the town was all illuminated; from the deck of the ship you could see the electric light shining on the tall white houses; there were the black masses of the acacia-trees along the promenade; then there were the long lines of silver reflections quivering on the glassy water. The music was gay waltz music; it was all pretty, modern, French, light-hearted; she, lying back in her chair, and looking towards the shore, might have fancied herself at Biarritz, at Nice, at Monte Carlo. She was chattering away vivaciously. Would it not make an excellent Impressionist subject—the spectral houses, the dark masses of the trees, the blue-white globes, the quivering of the reflected lights down through the black deeps? She would like to try it herself—in oils, when she had grown more familiar with that medium.

"What do you say, Ernest?" she asked, looking round, for Wolfenberg was standing by.

"Whatever you see your way to doing, Amélie," he made answer, "will have character and quality in it—and life."

Only one other occurrence remains to be chronicled of this evening; but that was of a wholly cataclysmic nature. The humble reporter of these various doings and proceedings, having been sent down to the saloon to order some "cold sodas" for the women-folk, was returning to his place, when he chanced to run against a young lady who was standing in the dusky shadow outside the top of the companion-way. And with every wish to be discreet, and blind, and non-existent, he could not but perceive that the young lady had just received, and was now quickly thrusting into her pocket, some scrap of paper that had been handed her by a young gentleman who was making off in another direction. The young man, clearly enough, was Julian Verrinder, who had come on board at Palermo in that curiously unaccountable fashion, apparently without any pre-arranged purpose, and professing to know no human creature in the ship. The young woman—oh, Baby, Baby!

Next morning was devoted to busy idleness. Some went off on an exploration of the older portions of Ortygia—though that was rather a difficult undertaking, many of the thoroughfares being so narrow that when you met a drove of donkeys they had

to be turned into the houses and the cellar-like wineshops to let you go by; others got a boat and made away for the River Anapus; while one or two of us thought we would stroll along to the Fountain of Arethusa—chiefly to fall in with the burning impetuosity and entreaties of our good Sappho. And as Lady Cameron went with us, so, you may be sure, did the ever-faithful Major. And here, too, was the Baby—the serious, the reserved, Juno-eyed maiden, whose very manner was a standing reproach to her more sprightly sister. As for the young man who had mysteriously sprung himself upon us after leaving Palermo— But he was nowhere to be seen.

And it must be owned that on this occasion the Major behaved himself in a most shocking fashion; for irreverence is not becoming to advanced years. He seemed to resent the quite genuine enthusiasm of our tumultuous poetess.

"*Arethusa arose, from her couch of snows,*
*In the Acroceraunian mountains,*"

she was repeating to herself in a proud way, as she regarded the confined little lake, and the tall reeds, and the overhanging acacias.

"I don't see any mountains," he observed, pettishly.

"Of course not," she made answer, staring at him. "Acroceraunia is away over in Greece—in Epirus. Don't you know the story?"

His silence confessed his ignorance; and right eagerly—for it was a tale after her own heart—did she pour into his unwilling ear the legend of the passionate river-god and the flying maiden. But the Major was lying in wait for his revenge.

"She came all the way under the sea, and made her appearance here?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed," said the delighted Sappho. "They say that if you throw anything into the River Alpheus—"

"She was a goddess, I presume?" he asked again.

"Oh, yes; Arethusa was a daughter of Oceanus."

"I thought as much: if she came all the way under the Ionian Sea, she must have been an excellent Diva." And the wicked old man giggled and gurgled with laughter until he was purple in the face; and not only that, but he treasured up his wretched schoolboy witticism, so that every one on board the ship had heard of it before the evening. As for Sappho, she would pay no

heed to such ribaldry. She gave Phaon's leading-string a twitch, and turned haughtily aside.

We weighed anchor about mid-day, and steamed slowly out of the harbor; and in due course of time we had lost sight of land again—nothing visible anywhere save that wide circle of trembling and shining blue, with a few motionless yellow-white clouds along the southern horizon. But although there was an abundance of leisure for everybody all the afternoon, it was not until the evening, in fact it was not until night fell, that Mrs. Threepenny-bit and her friend Peggy found an opportunity of talking over what had taken place on shore at Syracuse. They came right aft, to their accustomed corner behind the wheel-box, where there was little danger of their being overheard. And it soon became apparent that the elder woman had been much impressed by one or two circumstances that had come under her observation during the last day or two.

"I don't know what is going to happen," said she, rather sadly. "I have such a respect and liking for Mr. Wolfenberg—such an admiration for the simplicity and refinement of his character—yes, and such a sympathy for his lonely position—"

"And so have I," says Peggy, breaking in. "But when a married man allows himself to fall in love with an unmarried young woman, he must take the consequences."

"Peggy!" the elder woman exclaims, indignantly. "That is not the situation at all. He is not in love with her, as a younger man might be. He has a great affection for her, no doubt, a most unselfish affection and care for her, every one can see that; and a deep interest in her and her future. I have told you all along that I considered the relationship existing between those two as a most beautiful thing—and I take her own description of it; but the difficulty is as to how any such relationship can be made permanent. That is where the danger comes in. He thinks, or he tries to persuade himself, that her mind is too downright, her brain too clear, for her to give way to the illusions of love; she will never marry; her career is art; she is an artist through and through. So he seems to think. But if she is an artist, she is also a woman."

"And very much of a woman," puts in Peggy.

"Have you noticed how thoughtful and careworn he has looked during the last day *or two*?" her companion goes on. "Do

you think he is beginning to see there is a possibility of Amélie Dumaresq falling away from that compact—a possibility of his being left alone? Did you notice the expression of his face yesterday, when he was standing by himself away up there on the Greek Theatre, and when she and the Russian had disappeared below?"

"A man cannot suffer the tortures of jealousy unless he is in love," says Peggy, in her frank way.

"It was something far wider and deeper than that," says the other, absently. "It appeared to me as if he were contemplating the possible ruin—the second and final ruin—of his life. All the schemes and hopes he had been counting on for the future—all the companionship and compensation he had been promised—tumbling away from beneath his feet: himself left betrayed by the very one who had made a show of coming to his rescue."

"Oh, no, no, Missis," says Peggy, with some effort at cheerfulness; "it isn't so tragic as all that—not yet, at all events. She has been flirting with the Russian, no doubt; and she may have had her head a little bit turned. But you know the remarkably blunt and plain things she says about marriage: she is not likely to be entrapped. All this will blow over; the Russian and his beautiful eyes will disappear at the end of the voyage; and she will return to her loyal allegiance—to her art and her friend. Why, she is bound in honor! How often has she declared her determination to make up to him for what that other woman has done?"

Mrs. Threepenny-bit was silent for a long time.

"It seems such a piteous thing," she said at length, with a bit of a sigh, "that a man of his fine and sensitive character should be at the mercy of the caprice of any woman. But perhaps you are right, Peggy. Perhaps, after all, Amélie Dumaresq will recover her senses, and will remember what she undertook. We shall see—and that very soon, if I am not mistaken."

## CHAPTER VIII

### "TO ATHENS SHALL THE LOVERS WEND"

We are somewhere in the Ionian Sea. It is early morning, shining and calm. One happens to be alone on deck when a young man makes his appearance, and approaches. He is a youth of a diffident and ingenuous aspect—English-looking, with just enough of a moustache to lend excuse for a touch of pomatum. But when, after a great deal of apology, and blushing, and shy appealing of eyes, he blurts out what he wants, one finds his demand is not nearly so modest as his manner: he would like an introduction to Lady Cameron of Inverfask!

"The fact is," he goes on, in this nervous, embarrassed fashion, "I—I made the acquaintance of her sister Emily in Milan—and—I don't want to have anything underhand about it—"

"Of course not; quite right. Why don't you go straight to Lady Cameron, and tell her you got to know her sister in Milan?"

"It isn't as easy as all that," he answers, rather ruefully. "She might begin to question Emily—Miss Rosslyn, I mean. And—and—there was a kind of informality, don't you know. I suppose you heard of the lady Miss Rosslyn was travelling with being taken so seriously ill; and her husband, Mr. Vincent, would not leave her for a moment almost; and so—so, you see—Emily was pretty well alone. And I was staying in the same hotel. And—and she used to go every morning to the Cathedral—and then I used to meet her—and—and the Public Gardens are not far off. Well, perhaps I'd better tell you the downright truth at once. We are engaged to be married."

"The mischief you are!"

"At least, there is an understanding that is quite as good," he says; and then he goes on, with a little becoming hesitation: "And I don't see how any one can object. I am my own master now. I can make a settlement on Emily that I think will satisfy her family, however rich they may be—"

"They are not *rich; they are* poor—for Americans. But why

on earth didn't you go to Lady Cameron the very moment you came on board at Palermo, and tell her the whole story?"

"It isn't as easy as you seem to think," he makes answer, almost in tones of reproach. "I'm in a kind of way under orders —from her. I've got to do as I'm bid. But she couldn't object to my writing home to my mother and sister: they are not in a position to ask questions. And, you see, if you would be so awfully kind as to introduce me to Lady Cameron, then through her I could make Emily's acquaintance all fair and square and above-board, in a proper and regular manner. That's how I am instructed, as the lawyers say," adds this poor young man, with a dolorous attempt at a smile.

"Very well; come down early to lunch; blunder into a seat at our table; and then we'll see."

That, to our small circle, was the event of the day. Sharp at one the young man appeared at the door of the saloon; he looked round with a pretty humility; and at length came and gently subsided into the vacant seat opposite the Baby. A word or two introduced him to Lady Cameron, who was also on the other side of the table. And that was all he had bargained for; indeed, formal introductions are rarely needed on board ship; but how could one resist the temptation of confronting those two young wretches now that they were brought face to face?

"Miss Emily, may I introduce to you Mr. Julian Verrinder?"

The two abandoned hypocrites bowed gravely: he, with downcast eyes, showing some little confusion; she, with her statuesque face grown pæony-like, not daring to look up. Yet perhaps their embarrassment remained unnoticed; for just at that moment Peggy, as a young house-mistress, was giving us her experiences of Highland servants as contrasted with the American (or sub-Irish) variety; and of course that was a most interesting topic for the other manager who rules over us all. But it seemed to one of us sitting there that a great and glorious nation like the Americans—a progressive nation—a nation clamorously calling attention to its gigantic strides—it seemed to one of us that such a nation should not stop short at the abolition of slavery; it should go a step further, and abolish domestic service altogether as degrading and inhuman.

"And who is to find work for all those people, then?" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit. "Who is to support them?"

"The State, of course; State compensation."

"They are to be brought up in pampered idleness?"

"Why, certainly!"

"Then shall the valets rejoice and the maidservants skip like the young rams," observed Peggy, demurely—and fortunately she was but half-heard.

This was a hot and sultry and languorous afternoon. Peggy said she wished she had brought a few begging-letters with her, to hang up in her cabin; their coolness, she maintained, would turn any place into a refrigerator. Laziness was the order of the day on deck: books, chess, dominoes, draughts, surreptitious snoozing. But of a sudden, just after sunset, a rumor ran like wild-fire through the ship that the coast of Greece was in sight; there was a quick abandonment of these various occupations, and a rush to the rail; and there, sure enough, far away in the north-east, beyond the dark indigo sea, and half-hidden in a crimson-tinted mist that caught its color from the fading western skies, rose one or two mountainous peaks, pale and shadowy, in the neighborhood of Cape Matapan. At once our enthusiastic Sappho was in a state of tremulous excitement. What was the ancient name of the Cape? What?—Tænarium, where Hercules slew the serpent? And Cape Malea was the next point? And Cerigo—Cythera—was right ahead of us? These other women—poor, vain, soulless creatures—were now all going away to their state-rooms to dress for dinner; but not so Sappho; was it likely, when we should soon be approaching the island where Aphrodite sprang glorious from the white sea-foam? The dusk fell. The sultry day had been storing up electricity; blue lightning-flashes began to play along the northern horizon. But at length we also were forced to leave our good Sappho, her arms pensive on the rail; we guessed we should find some fruits of this rapt contemplation later on.

Now what vengeful god or goddess, what unholy witch or wizard, threw a spell of incantation over our ship on this succeeding night, so that during the dark hours we were whisked away some thousands of miles from our proper whereabouts? The next morning found us in the Sound of Sleat! There could be no doubt about it. A single glance out of the port-hole revealed the strangely familiar features—the calm, glassy blue sea; the bare, and lonely, *and apparently* tenantless islands; the first rays

of the sun, streaming over from the east, lighting up those solitary shores. But—but—if this is the coast of Skye, where are the mighty Coolins with their black and jagged peaks piercing the heavens? And those islands, in their soft and beautiful rose-grey: are they not something warmer in tone than the wind-swept Hebrides? And then again, when one collects one's scattered senses, ought we not by rights to be somewhere in the neighborhood of Argolis, with Hydra on the one hand, and Agio Giorgio on the other, and before us the spacious Gulf of Ægina? It is time to get on deck, to clear up these bewildering doubts.

And here is Peggy, luckily all by herself.

"Do you know," she says, with something of a rueful smile, "that when I got up this morning and looked out, I thought I was at home again!"—and when this tall young lady talks about home, it is *not* Kentucky she has in her mind, though 'twas there she was born.

Suddenly she alters her tone.

"Now that we have a minute together," says she, rather indignantly, "perhaps you will tell me when I am to get back to my own friends. I came away with you. I did not bargain to go about with an inspired maniac of a poetess and a swearing old Major making bad jokes—"

"Oh, oh! For you to say anything against the Major—considering his devotion to you—and the way you have been openly carrying-on with him—"

"Carrying on!" she says. "Much chance of carrying-on with anybody—while the Baby's great eyes are staring at you all the time!"

"Perhaps the Baby might as well look to herself," one ventures to say.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. But here is some information for you. You know it was merely because we had Amélie Dumaresq thrown on our hands that you and we got separated when we went on shore. But this time, while we are at Athens, the Dumaresqs are going to stay at a hotel, to save the trouble of coming back each night to the steamer. And you may be sure that the Major will dine at a hotel, for the sake of variety—yes, and Sappho, too, if anybody will ask her—"

"And we shall be together again and by ourselves!" says Peg-

gy, with a quick delight shining in her eyes. "That will be something to make up! And I'll tell you what we must do. After dinner the Missis and you must come into my cabin; and I'll get out my banjo; and we'll have one of the real old evenings! I think we'll give old Father Time what for; we'll make things hum a little!" But here her face falls. "There's the Baby—I forgot her."

"Is she so very austere?"

"Oh, she is too solemn for anything!" says Peggy, with a certain impatience, though she is fond enough of the serious-minded Emily all the same. "She ought to go into some religious retreat—some sisterhood: that will be the end of it all, I know. And here she is coming now. Didn't I tell you? I never can get a word with anybody, without finding her big eyes staring at me!"

And so we steamed on through the luminous and glancing azure, on the one hand the ruddy island of Ægina, on the other the mountainous coast that leads away down to "Sunium's marbled steep." It was a delightful, idle, dreamy kind of morning—not the kind of morning on which one wanted to be startled or even surprised; so that when a very gentle-voiced and gentle-eyed lady came up to our Mrs. Threepenny-bit, and held out her binocular glass, and said, quietly,

"Wouldn't you like to look at the Acropolis?"—the smaller woman could only stammer out, in a frightened sort of way:

"The—Acropolis of Athens?"

The next instant she was on her feet, staring eagerly and goggle-eyed. For yonder, unmistakably, were the distant and lofty heights, with a glimmer of grey columns, and with a strip of grey town far below; and yonder, too, were the scarred and shaggy slopes of Mount Hymettus; while down by the blue sea was the bold scimitar-sweep of the shores of Salamis. The first impression we received was one of extreme loneliness and lifelessness, despite the presence of that powdered grey city. There was not a boat moving anywhere on these shining clear waters; the coast-line seemed strangely uninhabited. For one thing, we were not going round into the Peiræus, on account of certain rumors of fever that had reached us at Syracuse; we were making in for the solitary little Bay of Phalerum; and that we took possession of, and had all to ourselves.

"Peggy," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, some little time thereafter, when we had got ready to go ashore for a preliminary look round —and she spoke in a low voice—"have you heard? Mr. Hitrovo is going to stay at the same hotel with the Dumaresqs."

Peggy said nothing, but looked much.

"And they have asked us to lunch with them to-morrow," her friend continued; "and I have accepted, for all of us."

"Will the Russian be there?" asked Peggy.

"That depends on whether Amélie Dumaresq wants him to be there. It is all her arrangement. If she wishes him to be there he will be there. She has a way of getting everything she wants —even if it were the moon, I should think."

"And Wolfenberg?"

"Peggy," said the smaller woman, "Mr. Wolfenberg is in charge of them! Do you mean to say there might be a possibility of the Russian being present as their guest—making up a family party, almost—and Wolfenberg absent? That would be too—too—much!"

"Yet such things have happened," observed Peggy, calmly, as she watched the men bringing the boats round to take us in to the land.

Truly it is an ignominious thing that you have to approach Athens by either rail or tramway; but travellers must be content; and when we got ashore we took our tickets in the empty little station at Phalerum, just as if we had been going to Greenwich. And when the train came in, our party of four got possession of a compartment in the most ordinary way: there positively would have been no enthusiasm, no excitement, no recalling of ancient deeds and ancient glories, had not our dear Sappho skipped in also, followed by the Major in pursuit of Peggy. And in vain did Sappho strive to conceal her exaltation. As we moved out into the arid and dusty plain, she was all eagerness to catch a glimpse of the River Cephissus—the Cephissus in which the youthful Theseus had bathed before going up to the palace of King Ægeus to claim his rights. Alas! there was no Cephissus. It had all gone away. We saw one or two channels in the limy soil that might at one time or another have been a river-bed; but were now more likely to be frequented by lizards than by fish. And there would be no Ilissus either, then? she demanded. And no Fountain of Callirrhoe?

"The whole place is burned up," said the Major, who seemed secretly to rejoice in her disappointment. "And sha'n't we be roasted alive in this blessed town! I tell you, about the only cool thing we are likely to find in Athens is the frieze of the Parthenon."

He giggled; but no one else did. This brutality seemed to set the seal on our degradation. It was only fit that we should arrive at Athens carrying railway-tickets in our hands.

But on reaching the terminus we managed to throw off those two: our party of four just filled a carriage; and, as we drove away, we caught sight of the Major having perforce, and probably with a very ill grace, to offer a seat in his vehicle to his forlorn companion. We saw no more of Sappho for a long time thereafter—not, indeed, until we found her in front of the little Temple of Nike Apteros, absorbed and awe-stricken, and no doubt dreaming of the black-sailed ships coming back from Crete, far out on yonder blue plain of sea.

We made direct away for the Acropolis, of course; our first stage in the ever-ascending route being the Temple of Theseus, where we found the Dumaresqs and Wolfenberg—the Russian being unexpectedly absent. Amélie Dumaresq—who was somehow always the central figure of any such chance-formed group, and whose opinions seemed to demand attention—did not appear to have been impressed by the Theseum. It was smaller than she had anticipated. It had been copied so often that itself looked like a copy. Roofed over, it had the appearance of a museum. It was too complete. There was not enough ruin about it. If the Venetians, in besieging the Acropolis, had thrown a few bombs into this building, and knocked it about a bit, it would have been infinitely improved. It wanted the letting in of daylight—and a background of blue sky for the pillars. And so forth. Wolfenberg listened.

"Amélie," said he, with a smile, "come with me. I will show you something that will interest you."

He took her to the end of the building where, out of range of the sunlight, there were several swarthy-complexioned figures lying in various attitudes prone on the steps, either asleep or merely basking in luxurious idleness. It was all very picturesque and fine in color: the diverse costumes, the warm tones of the shadowed marble, the palpitating, hot air beyond, the aerial tints of the dis-

tant hills. And here, also, walking about in very brave array, were a couple of Cretans—a couple of unmistakable cut-throats, if physiognomy ever spoke a word of truth. They stared at her; she stared at them; it was not her eyes—those bold, lustrous black eyes—that were first abashed.

But then again, when our panting horses had dragged us away up the stony hill, and when on foot we had ascended the worn and steep steps of the Propylæa, and when at length, after toiling across a wilderness of broken pillars, pedestals, architraves, cornices, and the like, the marble fragments lying tumbled about among parched weeds and thistles—when at length we came in front of the Parthenon, there was no disposition to criticise, nor even to speak, manifested by this young woman. Such artist-soul as she possessed seemed entirely entranced by the simplicity and grandeur of this spectacle; and not only that, but by the actual beauty of the color—those lonely and lofty columns, golden-white and saffron-stained, shining calm and fair against the dark, deep, pellucid blue of a perfectly cloudless sky. No picture, or any other representation of the Parthenon, can give any one the faintest idea of this rich and vivid and exquisite color; nor can all the photographs that ever were manufactured convey the least impression of the vastness of the ruin, or of its height, and remoteness from the rest of the surrounding world. You forget that there is a populous city with its swarms of houses lying scattered about somewhere down in the valley. You forget the long centuries of wrong and rapine and outrage that have swept by like so many tempests, destroying much, but not destroying all. These columns, broken and defaced as they are, seem to rise above such transitory things—to be somehow dissociated from the earth; voiceless, they appear to be holding communion with the still heavens; and to have become immortal through their imperishable beauty. For already we had begun to yield to the strange fascination that, while you are in Athens, seems to draw you involuntarily away up to this grand, lonely, beautiful thing, and to leave you pretty well indifferent to aught else.

Not but that there were plenty of other objects of intensest interest, up here on the Acropolis. Each one of our scattered party seemed to go his own way, wandering about, finding out for himself or herself, and not anxious for any companionship. Groups formed by accident; then separated again; one amateur

explorer would be chiefly interested in the traces left by Turk and Christian on the Greek walls; another would go about examining the ornamentation of fallen pediments and capitals; a third might have his eyes attracted by the great panorama of sea, and plain, and mountain, with the marble quarries of Pentelicus gleaming white on the far hill-side. And so it was without any surprise that one came across Ernest Wolfenberg, standing quite by himself, in front of the little Temple of the Caryatides.

"Isn't it strange," he began to say, in his thoughtful and dispassionate manner, "how difficult it is for the official mind—and for some other minds as well—to draw the line between preservation and restoration? They cannot for the life of them leave things alone; they must of necessity bring in the modern mechanic to tinker and beautify. And there's another thing they can't resist doing: when they find anything detachable they can't help rushing off with it at once to a museum, and putting it in a glass case if that is possible. And yet half the value of memorials of ancient life and art lies in their being allowed to remain *in situ*. Just imagine how immeasurably interesting it would be if the excavators would leave a house in Pompeii precisely as they found it: every object—every knitting-needle, and lamp, and dish, and wine-glass—in its place, just as it was when the ashes began to fall. But they couldn't bring themselves to do that. They must snatch up every article, and away with it to the Naples Museum, where there are dozens and hundreds of them already. And the restorers are infinitely worse. Look at this beautiful little building that has been talked about for ages and ages. I suppose putting in that wedge of entablature may be forgiven—perhaps it was necessary; but, you see, they couldn't stop there; they had to add a brand-new Caryatid. The Temple of the Six Virgins ought to have six figures; they couldn't leave it with five; so they added a new one. And then, naturally, you begin to consider everything suspect. These bits of egg-and-dart decoration lying about: how do you know that the modern mechanic's chisel has not been tinkering at them? And yet," he went on presently, "I must try to believe that the scroll-work inside the Erechtheum has been left untouched: it is so indescribably beautiful. Did you notice it particularly in the inner temple and over the doorway? It is well sheltered there; perhaps that accounts for its perfect state. Come, shall we go round and have another look?"

Well, a second visit, although the afternoon was drawing on, was no great hardship; for the Erechtheum is far and away the most graceful of all the Acropolis monuments. Moreover, the entrance was only a few yards distant. But we were suddenly to be recalled from these architectural questions to more living interests. We were just about to pass round by the steps leading up to the tall and elegant Ionic pillars, when we perceived two figures there, at the base of the columns, and perhaps half a yard or so within. They were Paul Hitrovo and Amélie Dumaresq. It could not be said that there was any effort at concealment on their part; still, their appearance here was in a measure startling; for the Russian had not hitherto been visible during the day. Another thing: ordinarily, in talking to Hitrovo, Amélie regarded him with frank and upturned and smiling eyes; but now her head was downcast; her face was concerned and grave; she was vaguely scoring the dust with the point of her sunshade. He, on the other hand, had his eyes intently fixed on her—so that neither noticed the approach of strangers.

Wolfenberg turned quickly aside—perhaps pretending to have seen nothing.

"Some other time—any time—" he said, hurriedly, and yet with some affectation of calm indifference. "The fact is, a preliminary glance round is quite enough for to-day; now we know where to come for closer study. And—and we must not let the women-folk get tired, especially Mrs. Dumaresq, who is not very strong. Have you seen her of late? I suppose she is sitting down somewhere, talking to some one. I must go and try to find her anyway. There are your people coming round yonder by the Parthenon." And so he went away; and those two, whatever they were talking about, were left undisturbed.

It was drawing towards dusk when we got back to the little wooden jetty at Phalerum; and twilight had fallen by the time the ship's boat had carried us out to the *Orotania*. This evening, at dinner, we had a new experience: the vacant spaces at our table were conspicuous. And we should hardly have imagined that we should so have felt the absence of three people who, not so very long ago, had been entirely strangers to us. But there was this about Amélie Dumaresq in particular—that whether she attracted or repelled you, you could not but be impressed by her presence. She was there, very much in evidence; of strong and assertive

WOLFENBERG TURNED QUICKLY ASIDE, PRETENDING TO HAVE SEEN NOTHING.

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vitality; full-pulsating, as it were, with gayety and the enjoyment of life, and perfectly well aware of all her wilfulness, her charm, her intrepid opinions, and (not least) the power of the laughing blaze of her black eyes. Wolfenberg, too, in his more retiring way, had grown to interest us deeply; we seemed to miss the fine, thoughtful, ascetic face, the sympathetic grey eyes, even the quietly humorous fashion in which he was wont to apologize for the young lady's audacities. As for the sad-faced mother— But she was content to remain mostly in the background, a not unconcerned spectator of what was going on.

However, we were not wholly deserted; for Julian Verrinder, seeing these unoccupied places, made bold to come and take one of them, with many and modest excuses. And nothing could exceed the courteous and pleasant manner in which he tried to ingratiate himself with Lady Cameron and with our Mrs. Threepenny-bit, offering them all kinds of things they didn't want, asking them shy questions about their day's doings, and meekly listening, and never obtruding a word about himself. And he agreed with all their opinions, before they had got them half uttered; until they could not but have been convinced that he was a most intelligent young man. On the surface he did not pay much attention to Emily Rosslyn; but he had the ineffable pleasure of tendering her the cruet-stand, in the temporary absence of the steward, or he would venture to recommend the fresh salad, or the olives, or the caviare. As for her, the young wretch affected to treat him as almost an absolute stranger; she would hardly even vouchsafe him a timid "No, thank you!" Perhaps she was in trembling terror lest some incautious word or sign might betray the amazing truth.

It was a beautiful night on deck, the stars and planets lambent in the deep violet vault. There was a perfect silence; the famous city was far enough away to send us no sound, while we guessed that now there would not be much of tumult up there on the solitary heights of the Acropolis, near to the throbbing and yet benign and tranquil skies. If there could be anything anywhere out of consonance with the prevailing calm in which the world was shrouded, it could only be, perhaps, in some solitary and aching heart, questioning itself, or nerving itself for the future; and such things are kept hidden away and unrevealed.

"Did *you speak to Mr. Wolfenberg* to-day?" asked Peggy of

her friend, as they were leaning on the rail, and looking across the black water to the dim, uncertain lights.

"Oh, yes."

"And he is to be of the party at the hotel to-morrow?"

"I understand so."

"I am glad of that," she says; and then she adds, slowly: "Because—because—otherwise, I don't think I should have gone."

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## CHAPTER IX

### FACING CONTINGENCIES

THE gods were good to Sappho on the following day: they called the lost Ilissus back to life again; Cephissus, also, they summoned from his subterranean lair. We had been driving about hither and thither during the morning—to a number of places it is needless to enumerate here; and all the while we had been conscious of an ever-increasing darkness overhead. Indeed it was welcome; for we had become tired of that long period of blue skies, blue seas, and glaring sunlight; and were quite glad to think of the coolness of a shower of rain. But there was more coming than we bargained for. The surrounding mountains had grown more and more sombre; they seemed to draw strangely near, as if they would hem in the doomed town; the air was stifling; the impending darkness deepened, and still further deepened; what wan light there was came in horizontally, and touched the fronts of the houses in a spectral fashion. Then, as we watched and waited in this ominous silence, of a sudden, out of the black bosom of the hills, there leaped a red flash of flame; it struck down; it appeared to splinter itself on the ground, and to spread itself out again in swift and trembling filaments of fire. There was a low premonitory growl—answered somewhere else. Another blaze of flame leaped out of the black: this time there was a sharper rattle, that echoed all around. And now the fun grew fast and furious; the other portions of the heavens joined in; sometimes there was a continuous and blinding dazzle of crimson —a chain of fire, as it were; while the noise grew deafening—

Corydallus, Pentelicus, Hymettus calling to each other across the awe-stricken valleys. Then the accumulated black masses immediately over us must needs take part; there were one or two knife-like gleams of pink; and at the same moment an ear-splitting roar and clamor that seemed to say that all the buildings of the Acropolis—the Parthenon, the Propylæa, the Erechtheum—were coming hurling headlong down on the top of the devoted city. And meanwhile the rain had been descending in sheets—a deluge that appeared to consist of ten thousand waterspouts; insomuch that in an incredibly short space of time Athens had become completely transfigured, her dry and dusty thoroughfares changed into tawny canals, with a flood in them so deep and opaque that the unaccustomed horses refused to go forward. As for ourselves, we fled for refuge into the nearest public building, which chanced to be the museum in which the Schliemann relics (from Mykenæ) are treasured; but even here we had to face cascades of water that came surging along the open stone galleries and down the wide staircases. But what did we care for all this terrific commotion—and also for having to wade a foot deep in passing from one room to the other—when we could calculate on this amazing storm having roused the two slumbering rivers, and, when we thought of the joy and rapture of our beloved Sappho? For we knew that, as we went back to Phalerum in the afternoon, we should find the Cephissus a whirling and riotous torrent, sweeping before it mud, and gravel, and branches onwards to the sea, and also that the wide plain which had always seemed to us so parched and burned-up would now show silver-glancing pools and lakes, between the rows of olive and vine. Perhaps, moreover, in some happy moment, we might discover the elusive Fountain of Callirrhoe, that hitherto has been for us invisible.

But in the meantime we had to keep our appointment with the Dumaresqs; and when, at length, for about two hours' imprisonment in this building, a pale, tremulous, lemon-hued light told us that the storm-clouds were lifting themselves away from the deluged city, we ventured out, and drove away down through those yellow canals to the hotel. And here, in the long, bare, shaded, foreign-looking apartment, it was from the outset obvious that it was Amélie Dumaresq, not her mother, who was our hostess. She managed everything—arranged everything—consulted with the landlord—directed the *waiters*. She was in high spirits; this

little diversion from the routine life on board ship seemed to please her. She was looking her best, too; and was very prettily and neatly attired, with but little ornament; a dagger of rose-red coral was effective in the splendid masses of her black hair.

She took the head of the table as a matter of course—to save her mother trouble. Wolfenberg she asked to preside at the other end. To Paul Hitrovo she did *not* give the place of honor on her right; his presence there was significant enough without that; and, in truth, she affected to take but scant notice of him. As for him, he remained carelessly quiet throughout the little banquet; he did not seek to interfere in the conversation; when he did speak at all, it was generally some mere bit of comment —of a half-cynical and not unamusing kind. He was next to the Baby. "The two young people must sit together," Amélie Dumaresq had said, benignly—playing the part of matron and house-mistress.

And now that everything was set going, the young hostess proceeded with right good will to entertain her guests, which for her was easy enough. Laughing, chattering, appealing to this one and that, revealing the results of a rather malicious observation of her fellow-passengers, she kept the ball of conversation rolling briskly enough and without effort, so alert, independent, many-sided did she show herself. And again on this occasion she was merciful to us. She did not hack and hew at the pedestals of accepted tradition; she did not tear down veils to exhibit shattered idols; she even let Homer alone—and was entirely good-natured. If there was any one whose speeches did not seem to meet with the full approval of our miniature Censor of Morals it was M. Paul Hitrovo; and yet such chance things as we heard were surely harmless enough.

"Isn't it sad," he said, in a kind of undertone, to the Baby, *apropos* of something or another, "isn't it very sad to think of the vast number of people who are slaves to duty? It seems such a strange superstition."

Well, that was nothing. But on one occasion he did manage to provoke our Mrs. Threepenny-bit into a little mild interference.

"After all," he happened to say to that ingenuous young neighbor of his, "human nature is a good deal stronger than the Ten Commandments."

"You mean that sometimes the Ten Commandments get broken?" the small woman opposite him put in.

"Why not frequently?" he suggested, with a smile.

"Perhaps," she answered him. "But at the same time, if there never had been any Mount Sinai at all, human nature would have had to invent the Ten Commandments for its own preservation."

It was hardly a rebuke; yet Amélie Dumaresq looked quickly from the one to the other; perhaps she was anxious to see what impression this young man, in these more intimate circumstances, produced on her friends.

To outward appearance she was far more attentive to Wolfenberg. She paid him all kinds of little flatteries—sometimes disguised as reproach.

"Ernest," she called to him, "don't you see that the very heavens are interposing to befriend you? This miracle of a flood has all come about to show you the Fountain of Callirrhoe. You can have no further excuse for neglecting your picture. Why, I want those people on board the ship who have never seen any of your work just to understand a little who it is to whom they say 'Good-morning!' when they come up on deck."

"I'm afraid, Amélie," he said, in his quiet way, "the Fountain of Callirrhoe has all gone away—vanished—as far as I am concerned. I have not thought of it of late. It was only a passing suggestion."

"Well, if you have lost interest in it, why not begin something else?" she demanded, in her downright fashion. "Why not the Dance of the Cobras? Do you know," she said, turning to her other guests, "that cobras have the strangest habit, on moonlight nights, of keeping their head erect, and swaying themselves from side to side, and watching their shadows on the ground? They seem to enjoy it; the sinuous movement pleases them. Don't you think that Mr. Wolfenberg could make something very mysterious and imaginative out of such a subject? And they are said to be curiously susceptible to musical sound, too. Couldn't that be brought in?—a veranda—some one playing inside—the beasts charmed out from their hiding-places into the moonlight—"

"It makes one's flesh creep to think of it!" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with an *involuntary* shudder.

"Oh, I like looking into the snake-cases in the Zoological Gardens," said Amélie Dumaresq, cheerfully enough. "But what I confess I cannot do is to look into the monkey-house. That is quite different. Any other beast I can stare in the face—but a monkey—no— I somehow feel ashamed. It seems as if I were guilty of impertinence—as if I had shut up a poor relation in there—and might at least pass on and pretend not to see. Don't his eyes reproach you? He appears to ask why he should be so treated—why he should be put behind bars, just like an ordinary wild beast; while you are walking about at liberty, in splendid silks and satins. But Ernest—come, now—what about the cobras in moonlight? I really cannot have those people talking to you as if you were one of themselves; they must know who you are; I must have something to show them—"

"My dear Amélie," he said, quite good-naturedly, "what is the use of painting nowadays? Picture-buying is a lost art—"

"Oh, for you to say that!" she exclaimed, in reproachful tones.

"The fact is," he said, "I am going to take to another way of earning my living altogether. Shall I tell you? Very well. I don't know whether you are aware that only sixty-seven eggs of the great auk are known to exist. Of course they are extremely valuable. One of them was recently sold for three hundred pounds. Now I propose to introduce on the scene an ancient and simple sea-captain—a whaler or sealer from Baffin's Bay, or some such remote place; and he must have a circumstantial story of a discovered island, where he found a heap of big eggs, which he brought home out of mere curiosity. He doesn't know that they are the great auk's eggs; of course not; but still, the simple mariner won't accept the first bid for them—"

"But where can he have got them, if they are so rare?" she interposed.

"I am going to make them for him," he replied, calmly. "An imitation that will defy detection—far more easy than you think. Besides, the honest tar's story would ward off suspicion. No doubt the price of auk's eggs will come down somewhat; but even at a hundred and fifty pounds apiece, or even at a hundred pounds apiece, a good steady supply—from the inexhaustible stores of the sealer's cabin—ought to make one's fortune."

"Well, well, Ernest!" she said. "And you are not ashamed to sit there and confess, before English people, that the tradition

of wooden nutmegs still lingers in the American national character?"

But all the same his fantastic fancy of the moment had served its end: it had drawn away the talk from the question of his painting; and we had noticed ere now that he was curiously shy about having his work spoken of before strangers. Amélie Dumaresq did not seem to understand, or at least to pay much heed to, this sensitiveness; and in the present case it was of slight consequence; for directly she was off and away to some other topic, with her usual happy-go-lucky impetuosity. It was a merry little occasion, free and unrestrained, as one might have thought, with nothing serious at all about it. But women's eyes are always observant.

That same night, when Peggy and her friend has secured a snug corner for themselves on deck—the heavens were all clear again, and the stars were throbbing luminously over the dark spaces of the sea—you may be sure it was to that mid-day festivity that their conversation turned.

"I tell you, Missis, I am convinced of it," says Peggy, with as much decision as she dare put into her necessarily low tones. "I tell you that man is in love with her, wholly, entirely, desperately in love with her—whether he himself knows it or not."

"What, the Russian?"

"Not at all! The Russian is only playing with her. He is too much in love with himself to be in love with anybody else. He thinks he has only got to look at you with his beautiful eyes, and you must succumb. He does not take the trouble to make himself agreeable; he expects you to amuse him; and then he smiles—and you are rewarded! No—it is Wolfenberg—"

"You are speaking of a married man, Peggy!" the other observes, severely.

"Worse luck," says Peggy, with a bit of a sigh. "But whether he himself knows it or not, that man is in love with Amélie Dumaresq; and this understanding of theirs—this compact—this exalted friendship—is with him only some desperate clinging on to what he feels must one day slip away from him. In love with her? Didn't you see how his eyes followed her wherever she went—as if it was a constant delight to him to let them rest even on the folds of her dress, or the coils of her hair, or the outline

of her neck and arms? He speaks to her as he speaks to no one else. His voice changes when he turns to her—it is so gentle, so intimate, so suggestive of an understanding that is hidden from outsiders. Perhaps she doesn't quite perceive it either. She is a little blunt—don't you think?—not exactly thick-skinned—but—but pretty well wrapped up in herself, and her own enjoyment of minute to minute? Of course, she has an immense admiration for him; but it seems to me as if it were more the artist she admired; she is proud of his position, and his advice, and his care of her, as well she might be."

"But what is to come of it all!" the elder woman exclaims—and this is no new cry of hers. "Oh, I cannot believe it! The position those two hold to each other is far too clearly defined for any such possibility; in her mind, at all events, it is defined clearly and absolutely; hasn't she talked about it with sufficient frankness? No; really I thought there was something almost noble about her when she first spoke to me about it; she seemed to see what was demanded of her; she seemed to rise to something finer than the gratification of her own immediate whims, and the flattery of every one who comes near her. And why shouldn't he take her at her word? He declares that her intellect is downright and uncompromising; she scorns illusions. This exalted companionship of theirs, when she grants it to him, is granted with full and accurate knowledge; there are no hazy possibilities of perilous sentiment hanging about in the background. Do you think he does not understand all that?"

"I can see what his eyes say," Peggy makes answer, stubbornly. "Until to-day I might have doubted—now I cannot."

But the elder woman shakes her head.

"No, no; the whole situation is dangerous enough without that. And it is about Wolfenberg that I am concerned: I think the young woman can take care of herself. And yet again if it should turn out that we have been speculating, and alarming ourselves without cause—or if something were to happen—"

"I know what would happen in a book or a play," says Peggy. "That dreadful woman over there in America would die. But in actual life the objectionable people are a long time in dying; and in the meanwhile the other people, who may have been waiting, have grown old."

"You have no right to look forward and count on any one's death!" says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with a touch of asperity. "It is inhuman—unnatural—no matter what has happened." And then, after a bit, she adds: "Don't you think, Peggy, that it would be a little more just to both Wolfenberg and Amélie Dumaresq if we accepted their own account of the relationship that exists between them—which is the only relationship that can exist between them?"

"But even then?" says Peggy. "Again and again you yourself have put the question: what guarantee is there that such a relationship should last? What is the bond between them? It is an ideal situation, no doubt; demanding self-sacrifice and constancy; and it may look beautiful at the moment; but what safeguard is there against all the temptations and incomprehensible vagaries of human nature?"

"Poor Wolfenberg!" said the elder woman, absently; the future seemed dark and enigmatical enough to her, so far as those two were concerned.

Now the morning of our last day at Athens was particularly bright, and busy, and cheerful. "Phaleron's wave" is clear: looking over the side into those green deeps, we could vaguely make out objects at the bottom, though we were anchored in six fathoms of water; while farther off the glassy surface, in the full glare of the sun, reflected the long lateen sails and the white-painted feluccas with a vividness bewildering to the eyes. And here was our indefatigable Sappho, bustling about with a great sheet of paper in her hand, and eagerly begging for signatures. It appeared that her soul had been fairly riven within her by the thought that English hands had harried the shrines of ancient Greece; and nothing would do but a passionate appeal, on the part of us Orotanians, to the British Government, praying that the Elgin Marbles should forthwith be restored. It was an eloquent and tempestuously-worded document, with plenty of incoherent indignation surging through it; and at the head of the sheet was the following quotation:

> 'Cold is the heart, fair Greece! that looks on thee,
> Nor feels as lovers o'er the dust they loved;
> Dull is the eye that will not weep to see
> Thy walls defaced, thy mouldering shrines removed
> By British hands, *which it* had best behoved

To guard those relics ne'er to be restored.
Curst be the hour when from their isle they roved,
And once again thy hapless bosom gored,
And snatch'd thy shrinking Gods to northern climes abhorred!'

"Somethinged sentimental rubbish!" growled the angry Major, when she had gone—and we hardly knew whether he was audaciously referring to the passage from *Childe Harold* or merely expressing his opinion of Miss Penguin's proposal. "Do you think the English Government would listen to a handful of irresponsible and impertinent busybodies? And if these mongrel modern Greeks got back the Elgin Marbles, what would they do with 'em? Why, sell 'em to some Yankee hotel proprietor, to stick about his staircases, alongside the cuspidors!"

By the way, we never learned what number of signatures Sappho obtained for her petition; nor did we ever subsequently hear of its having appeared in the newspapers. Perhaps, indeed, at some odd moment, Phaon may have eaten it, so inscrutable are the decrees of fate and the moods of a dog's appetite.

Our last day at Athens. Of course, we made our way back again to the Acropolis. And as we were toiling up the steep hill we chanced to notice the solitary figure of a man who was coming down from the scarred and bouldered heights of Areopagus. No doubt he had wandered up thither to have a look at the wide-scattered city lying far below, with its red-tiled roofs and cypress-gardens.

"It is Wolfenberg!" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with some surprise. "And alone! Why—surely, the others cannot have gone anywhere without him." And when she spoke of 'the others' we knew she was thinking of three.

"Oh, no, impossible!" said Peggy, in an undertone, for now he was drawing near.

But when he came up, we found he had no tragic tale of desertion to tell. He seemed in fairly good spirits. Mrs. Dumaresq had preferred to remain indoors this morning; she feared the heat; and she wanted a little rest. Nor did Amélie care to stir out. She had been making some purchases of millinery; and wished to get her things put in order before returning to the boat. So he had come wandering away by himself, counting on finding us somewhere about the Acropolis. Accordingly, we went on together.

But when we had got up to that lofty and spacious plateau, to

have a farewell look at the hills and the vales, the distant sea grown pale in the sunlight, and here, close at hand, the splendor of the tall pillars against the luminous blue of the sky, it very soon became obvious that Wolfenberg wished to take this opportunity to say something in confidence to the elder woman of our little group. They strolled away by themselves, and Peggy instinctively hung back. We saw them go slowly and still more slowly, apparently engaged in earnest conversation, until they stopped altogether—the two small figures out yonder on the plain of tumbled fragments and dusty weeds. Peggy was silent for a second or two; then she said:—

"I think he means to speak to her about the Russian. And I am glad of it. He ought to have some confidante. Don't you think he is in the strangest and saddest position? Mrs. Dumaresq is frightened to say anything to him about what has happened recently: no wonder. She is quite useless and helpless with an absolute and self-willed girl like that; and she is mortally afraid of doing or saying anything that may offend either Wolfenberg or her daughter." She glanced round her musingly. "Isn't it curious to think what various things have happened to individual human beings, up here on this hill, through all the centuries since those stones were carved? And now we have come to the very latest—the two people over yonder, in modern European dress, standing talking to each other. It seems commonplace, doesn't it; and yet it might turn out to be part of something tragic enough—" She suddenly broke off, and changed her tone. "No, no, I'm going to shut my eyes, and become optimist. I'm going to look forward to Amélie Dumaresq herself dispersing away all these doubts and fears. That is what she is going to do. The opportunity is before her. She is going to astonish us, and charm us, and make us all ashamed of ourselves, by showing herself nothing less than a thorough heroine!"

Meanwhile, whatever problem of human destiny or human character those two were discussing together, they were a long time engaged in it; so that the rest of us—including the Baby and Julian Verrinder, whose acquaintance with each other seemed to have developed with some rapidity—had abundant leisure for our final look round; and at length, when we all of us prepared to leave, Peggy's last word—as she glanced back to the beautiful temples all shattered *and ruined*—was *this*:

"Well, Athens did much for the Gods; but the Gods never seem to have done much for Athens."

Now hardly had the *Orotania* got under way again when two of us received a summons to go to Mrs. Threepenny-bit's cabin. The little woman appeared to be rather nervous and excited: it was clear she had something of importance to communicate.

"We had a long talk up there," she said (and well we knew of whom she was speaking), "and never shall I forget it as long as I live. I had some admiration for that man before; but now—now that he has quite revealed himself—I dare hardly say what I think of him. And there is no secret about it; he spoke quite frankly; he told me, in his simple and direct way, that we must all of us have seen the favor that Amélie was showing to this young Russian; and he hoped it would turn out for the best. It was but natural, he said. She was a young woman, with a fresh and eager and impulsive enjoyment of the world and all its interests: who could wonder if the passion of love came in to play its part, and lead on to marriage, and a happy settlement of her life? And when I interposed, and spoke of himself, I wish you could have heard what he answered. Not that I forget a single word; but that there was something so noble, so simple, so unreserved in the very manner in which he put himself out of the question altogether. He was not to be thought of. His was a broken life altogether, he said. If this new interest that appeared to have come into her existence was likely to secure her happiness, that was everything."

The person who was telling us these things is not of a very emotional nature; but, all the same, her lashes grew moist; and she furtively drew a finger-tip across her eyes.

"I thought his careworn face looked really beautiful as he was speaking," she went on, with an intensity of sympathy that caused her own voice to vibrate at times. "There seemed to me a kind of sanctity of renunciation in it; and a calmness, too, as though he had been contemplating this possibility not for the first time. He would hardly refer to himself at all. I had to do that. I confess I am a good deal more concerned about him than about her. But what he said was this: 'I put myself aside altogether. I had indulged a foolish dream: it must go, if there is need for it to go. Why not? What man has borne, man can bear; a *sharp pang* or two, and life grown a little greyer; but the years

PEGGY'S *LAST WORD WAS*: "WELL, ATHENS DID MUCH FOR THE *GODS; BUT THE GODS NEVER* SEEM TO HAVE DONE MUCH FOR *ATHENS.*"

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will go by all the same.' And again he said—but I wish you could have seen the beautiful expression of his face, in its calm heroism of resignation: he said, 'What right had I to think that a beautiful young creature like that, full of life and the enjoyment of life, should check the natural current of her existence—even for the sake of her art? I was wrong even there. If she must give up her work; if marriage is the one thing to secure her happiness—so be it. But at all events do not think that she has broken any understanding, or betrayed anybody, or done anything but what is perfectly right and straightforward and honest. *She* knows what I care most for—it is to see her perfectly happy: that being secured, my small affairs can shift for themselves.'"

"And about Hitrovo?" Peggy asked.

"Yes, that was his chief anxiety, his sole anxiety," her friend continued. "And I told him frankly that Mrs. Dumaresq had spoken to us; and that she was very much concerned; and that we had promised to make inquiries at Constantinople. But do not imagine it was to provoke suspicion, or to ask me to caution Amélie, that Wolfenberg came to me. Quite the reverse. He had nothing but commendation for the young Russian. He said it was so natural that Amélie should be attracted by him—his singularly good looks—his pleasant manner—his desire to please—"

"Oh, if he takes it that way, I am so glad," Peggy exclaimed, quite effusively. "I had been fearing such terrible things. I pitied him so!"

"Peggy," said the smaller woman, "Ernest Wolfenberg has not got that firm mouth for nothing. Do you think he cannot bring himself to face the inevitable—if it should turn out to be the inevitable? And of one thing you may be sure: Amélie Dumaresq will never know, she will never be allowed to know, what is going on in that man's heart, so long as he sees her happy, and beloved, and content." She paused for a moment or two; then she said, "Well, that poor woman, Mrs. Dumaresq, has made a direct appeal to us. Perhaps we may hear something in Constantinople."

And so, as the evening came along, we made our way down towards Cape Colonna; and then the dusk fell; and the dark; and thereafter we went *thundering* onwards through the night.

## CHAPTER X

### A DIP IN THE BOSPHORUS

"THERE was once a man," said Peggy—here on deck in the early morning—and she is looking across the dark blue Ægean, towards the mountainous coast-line of Mytilene looming out from amongst sunlit and silver showers—"there was once a man who owned a great many houses in the sea-side town where he lived; and so extremely careful of his property was he that when he found himself about to die, he insisted upon being taken somewhere else, so that the death-rate of the watering-place shouldn't be increased. Very thoughtful and prudent, wasn't he?"

Now when you have got hold of a good, capable l * * r, you should never interrupt. Silence is the surest encouragement. So Peggy proceeds:

"Yes; you think of such odd people when you lie awake in the morning. Did you ever hear of the hotel-keeper where there was only the one show-place in the neighborhood—the cemetery; and his wife was buried there; and he had put up the most elaborate monument to her—carved marble, and cherubs, and gold letters, and all that; but as soon as the season was over, and his visitors all gone away, he used to bring that monument in-doors and keep it under cover, leaving a plain block of stone in its place. He was another economical man."

"Very."

"But the cruellest thing I ever heard of," she continues, in a grave and absent kind of way, "was the man who was so anxious about his bric-à-brac. He was so afraid of having any of it destroyed that he spent years and years in forming a collection in duplicate; and when he had got that completed, he couldn't find a duplicate of himself to look after this second collection, and so he slowly pined away and died."

"Really?"

"Did I tell you that all those people were Scotch? Yes, they

were; but I was almost afraid to mention it; for the fact is, the Scotch are so desperately penurious that they won't even let you have a little joke—at their expense. But never mind," says Peggy, cheerfully, "I can forgive them everything, because they don't drop their *h*'s: that covers a multitude of sins."

"Did you never hear of a Scotchman having dropped an *h*?"

"Never!"

"There was one. Ben Jonson. But perhaps his family did it for him: most likely the Johnsons changed their name when they left Annandale."

"So Ben Jonson was a Scotchman? Shakespeare too, of course. I say," she goes on, in her irrelevant fashion, "have you been paying any attention of late to that young Mr. Verrinder? Really—really—he seems to me to presume just a little too much on his slight acquaintance with us; why, the way he seeks out my sister Emily—and keeps hanging about her all day long—if it were anybody but the Baby, one might almost imagine—"

"Don't you think it is a charming sight to see the two pretty dears together?"

At this Peggy looks up, startled.

"Oh, good gracious!—you don't mean—? No, no. That is quite too impossible! I know the Baby too well for that. The very last thing she would dream of! But, really, that young man is a little too forward—a little too persistent; and she is so solemn and meditative—so much absorbed in her dreams of the saints—that she does not understand how there may be occasion for people to observe and comment. Poor Baby? And yet it must be rather fine to live in a perpetual dreamland— Oh! bother the child!—here she comes again—looking more awful and more majestic than any twenty dozen of Pallas Athenês."

However, this was our good Sappho's morning: indeed, so excited was she by the near proximity of those Lesbian shores that she had forgot to go along and release Phaon from his durance vile. She kept mostly to the forward part of the vessel, walking about by herself, furtively writing on scraps of paper, and gazing across the blue waters to the low-lying hills under long levels of cumulus cloud and to the successive dark promontories appearing through white mists of rain. Nor was her enthusiasm likely to abate when, after having passed Cape Baba, we drew gradually

nearer to the yellow strip of Tenedos and to the "ringing plains of windy Troy." Fertile plains they seemed to us, with no very distinguishing feature beyond the odd little windmills of the wine-presses; but we knew that we had at least one person on board who could people those vague and vast sunlit distances with all kinds of shapes and phantoms. We surmised that the little black pencil was being kept busy. It is true that it was not until some time afterwards that we heard something of what had been vouchsafed to our perfervid one; and even then we could only guess at it from certain incoherent scraps that Peggy flung at us in a taunting and tantalizing fashion.

*'For the splendor of Helen still shines upon Troy!'*

she would say proudly in passing. And then again in returning she would murmur under her breath—

*'My spirit exults in delirious joy,*
*For the splendor of Helen still shines upon Troy!'*

At last, seeing that these spurs and whets were of no avail, she came and said:

"I can easily understand why it is that literary people will not, or dare not, confide in each other. They know what they have to expect—nothing but jealousy, and disparagement, and envy. And yet if you only saw what I have here in my hand—I can tell you it is something. Just listen to this:

*'Blow, beautiful land, in a blazon of flowers!*
*Burn, basilisk sun, through the sweltering hours!*
*My spirit exults in delirious joy,*
*For the splendor of Helen still shines upon Troy!—'*"

"Oh, go and pitch that trash overboard!"

"I knew it, I knew it," Peggy made answer, with much resignation. "In any other profession there is something like *esprit de corps*, and encouragement, and sympathy; but amongst literary folk there is nothing but backbiting and hatred. It is really extraordinary. I do believe the only man of letters I ever heard of who had a grain of magnanimity in his nature was Sir Walter Scott—the only one. It's very sad." And thereupon, with something of a sigh, she left us; and that was all we ever got to know about Sappho's emotions on beholding the Plain of Troy.

By-and-by we entered the many-fortressed Dardanelles, and steamed along until we got as far as Chanak-Kalesi, where we slowed to let the Purser and the Doctor go ashore for pratique. During this interval a rowing-boat came out from the brilliant little town of red and white and yellow houses; and presently some of our indefatigable Orotanians were chaffering over the side of the vessel for specimens of that bizarre green-and-gold and black-and-gold pottery that has given Chanak a certain name amongst collectors. But either the manufacture has greatly fallen off of late years, or the sailor-salesman had made a bad selection. We saw nothing to desire. On the other hand, Amélie Dumaresq was an eager, almost a furious, purchaser. She bought right and left; she seemed delighted with these barbaric extravagances of color; she laughed at the grotesque water-jugs—at the open-jawed lions and tigers, tawny-hued, with slashes of gold and scarlet. Wolfenberg looked on, amused. Her mother feebly protested. In the end she carried away to her cabin a whole armful of monstrosities.

And that was about the last we saw of Amélie Dumaresq for the remainder of this afternoon—as we went on by Cape Abydos, and past Gallipoli, towards the wider waters of the Sea of Marmora. For the whole situation of affairs was about to reach a new development. It appeared that certain amiable lunatics on board had conceived the project of getting up an amateur concert; and, in seeking about for performers, they had come, amongst others, to M. Paul Hitrovo. The young Russian admitted that he could fiddle a little; but said he had not brought his violin with him. They answered that there was no difficulty as to that; two or three of the musical Orotanians were possessed of violins; he could easily procure the loan of one. Still he hesitated—for he was lazily disposed; but presently he turned, with some little accession of interest, to Miss Dumaresq, who was standing by, and asked her whether she would play some concerted piece with him—some arrangement for violin and piano. She said at once that she would—if the piece could be found, and time given them for practising together. Then there was an instant call for music—Dvórak, Svendsen, Saint-Saëns being mostly in demand; but at last the young lady decided that she would try an arrangement of Liszt's *Rhapsodie Hongroise*, with which Hitrovo professed himself familiar. And *forthwith* they set to work. They were

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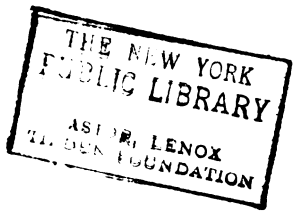
seen no more on deck that afternoon. If you happened to be going by an open skylight, and paused to listen, you could hear sounds from below—the staccato notes of the piano, the long-drawn sweep of the violin; while some of those who went down for tea remained to listen to this rehearsal. If Amélie Dumaresq was not much of a singer, she was at least an accomplished pianist. And as for the young Russian? Well, the report that came up of his violin performance was quite enthusiastic. At all events, those two had now found a congenial occupation for themselves, which enabled them to have as much of each other's society as they could possibly desire. Nor was it imperative that they should confine themselves to practising for the forthcoming concert. One of our musical young ladies (the one who had lent her violin) came up with the announcement that Mr. Hitrovo had just been playing the air of a Russian love song—so quaint, so simple, so melodious as to be altogether entrancing. And why should we be satisfied with that *Rhapsodie Hongroise?* Would not somebody make bold to ask him to play some of the Russian *Volkslieder?*

Now, if any of us had grown weary of perpetual sunlight and luminous blue seas, a change was at hand—a change sharp and decisive. Next morning, when we went on deck, we found the vessel being swept from stem to stern by torrents of rain; the crests of the waves torn into spindrift by blowing gusts of wind; seagulls dipping and soaring and gleaming white against the sombre and stormy sky. And it was with these unfamiliar accompaniments that we glided past the Seven Towers, past the domes and minarets of Stamboul, past the mosques of Sultan Achmet and Santa Sofia, past the long white buildings and the gardens of Seraglio Point; finally, as we opened up the Golden Horn, with its bridges, its shipping, its terraced hills, and its great Suleimanieh of Suleiman the Magnificent, we gradually ceased from further motion, and cast anchor in the green waters of the Bosphorus. It was all a bewilderment. Whence and whither had fled the City of many Dreams—rose-tinted, fair-shining, set in silent and ineffable beauty betwixt earth and heaven? There certainly was some kind of city—dark, spectral, phantasmal, behind these veils of flying mists and rain; for we could make out domes and spires and far-reaching panoramic heights reaching into the louring sky; but they were only vaguely visible; while around us there

THE STACCATO NOTES OF THE PIANO, THE LONG-DRAWN SWEEP OF THE VIOLIN.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was nothing but a maddening confusion of hurry and clamor and squalor—puffing steam-tenders, grimy tugs, pertinacious police-boats, swarming caïques, with steam-whistles shrieking, funnels pouring forth volumes of smoke, and officials in streaming black waterproofs shouting and gesticulating through the prevailing din. And here were we, a poor huddled group of creatures seeking shelter under the boat-platform abaft the bridge, while Peggy was asking ruefully if this was Greenock that we had reached at last. But Amélie Dumaresq, on the other hand, was wholly and entirely delighted; her eloquent black eyes were full of an eager interest; she shook the dripping rain from her hair—paying no heed.

"Isn't it splendid!" she cried, looking out on that ceaselessly-moving phantasmagoria of whirling clouds and smoke, and swift-hurrying black funnels, and lapping green water. "Not a trace of the chromo-lithograph! Not the least suggestion of the traditional old pictures. This is the real Constantinople. This is as real as Fulton Ferry. Isn't it a stroke of luck, Ernest!"

"It is a special interposition of providence, Amélie," said he, "to meet your frank downrightness of mind, your love of what is unconventional, and unexpected, and literally true. And yet, you know, the Constantinople of the chromo-lithographer must exist somewhere."

"In his own imagination," she replied, promptly. "In his own depraved imagination. It is his idea of what is beautiful. It is not what he sees, or has ever seen: it is what he thinks ought to be. And he goes about scattering his poison where it works most mischief—in the homes of the untravelled and uneducated."

"Why should not the poor man have his ideal of earthly beauty, like any one else?" said Paul Hitrovo, calmly smiling.

"I would set him to sweep the streets!" she cried, savagely. But the next instant she had grown conscious of her vehemence; she laughed a little as her eyes met those of the young Russian; and she said, with some faint touch of color in the pale, satin-smooth cheek: "Yes, let him have his ideal. I suppose a good many of us worship some kind or another of false idol, without knowing it."

However, this thunder-squall soon blew over; the morning cleared up; and *by-and-by* the Orotanians had all gone ashore

and dispersed their several ways—some to walk with slippered feet across the loose mattings of Sta. Sofia, others to purchase embroideries and Rhodian plates in the bazaars, others to call on friends away up in the fashionable quarters of Pera. And if two of us had a less simple duty to undertake—that, namely, of getting some information which might remove certain misgivings from the mind of an anxious mother—it needs only to be stated here that on this first day we were entirely unsuccessful. Of course it was a task that demanded a good deal of tact and delicacy: there could be no direct questioning, no bawling aloud in the market-place. And after all—as Wolfenberg was eager to point out—there was a kind of negative satisfaction to be drawn from the fact that, so far, nothing had been alleged in the remotest way against the young Russian. His family were of good repute: if this particular member of it had made himself unhappily conspicuous, the fact was likely to have been remembered.

"I should almost be inclined to give Mrs. Dumaresq the assurances she wants," said he, towards the end of the day. "I don't think she can have anything to fear. The family seem to be well known. And—and there is certainly nothing about the young man himself that would awake suspicion. Certainly not. His manner—his appearance—everything is in his favor. Besides that, Amélie herself is just about as good a judge of character as most. She is shrewd—clear-headed—observant: other women might get bewildered, and drawn into a perilous position: I don't think she would. So far, no one has had anything to say against him. Why should Mrs. Dumaresq fear? He seems to me to have everything that can make a young man attractive—good looks—good manners—and now there is this musical bond between the two of them—"

Not a word about himself: not a word about what he was freely ready to surrender—if she so wished it. We were on the landing-stage at Galata, waiting for the tender to come back from the ship. And perhaps he did not observe much of what was now around and before him?—the approach of evening—Constantinople become more like the Constantinople of pictures—the rounded domes and slender minarets of Stamboul growing dark against the splendor of the west—while away over in Scutari, from amidst the black cypress-groves, a high window here and there shot back a shaft of blinding flame. He may have seen, or

may not. His eyes were absent: perhaps he was looking at other places—and at other and future years. In any case, an incident now occurred that broke in upon his reverie in a sufficiently startling manner.

For in the morning the Dumaresqs had declared their intention of remaining on board during the first day; and Hitrovo had also decided to stay with them. But here, as we were loitering about this stone quay, there drove up a carriage into the open space behind us; and, turning, we found that it was the Dumaresqs and their Russian friend who had just arrived. What had induced them to change their mind? They did not carry parcels, like the Orotanians who had been to the bazaars; though Amélie Dumaresq had some flowers in her hand. Well, it was of little moment: only that this was the first time they had gone on shore without Wolfenberg's escort. And that of itself might have seemed significant, but what now happened drove speculation and reflection out of every one's head.

"You here, Ernest?" said the young lady, coming forward, in her frank and free fashion. "Have you had enough of Constantinople for one day?—aren't those mangy dogs too awful for anything—and the odors of the streets! But at least the Turks are a handsomer race than the Greeks—did you ever see a more despicable-looking lot than the Greeks of Athens?—about as bad as the French of Algiers. Don't you think so? But—but when are they going to send ashore for us?" she added impatiently.

"The tender will be back directly—we just missed it," said he.

"Oh, never mind the tender!" she exclaimed. "We shall be late for dinner—here—let us go out in this boat."

There was a caïque within a couple of yards of her: the swarthy boatman slowly backing down the stern, and mutely appealing to be hired. Now the ordinary light caïque is the most unstable boat in existence; unless you step at once right down into the middle of the frail craft, over you go. And this girl, in her light-hearted ignorance, and before any one could warn her, must needs go forward, and proceed to jump into the boat by placing one foot on the gunwale.

"Come along, mamma!" she cried at the same moment, counting on all being well.

But the gunwale simply went away from her. She threw up her arms *to save her balance*—scattering her bouquet; then some-

how she seemed to fall backwards; there was a piercing shriek from her mother; and in a second every one was at the edge of the water—and Hitrovo in it! He had slipped over, and got hold of her almost before she had time to sink. With one hand he made a grasp at the side of the caïque; but that was of no use—though the boatman sprang aft to help; then he turned to the stone ledge of the quay, where there was abundant aid to haul him out along with his limp charge; and the next moment they were standing there, dripping, breathless, and laughing, in a most sorry and ludicrous plight, and yet with one of them perhaps secretly exultant that a heroic rescue had been effected on such easy terms. The mamma alone was excited—near to hysterics: Amélie, on the other hand, as she shook her wet sleeves and skirts, was obviously and horribly ashamed.

"I will *not* wait for the steam-launch!" she exclaimed, half laughing and half in a temper. "Some one must hold this wretched boat until we all get in, and then we will sneak out to the ship, and steal up on board when nobody is looking. Call that a boat! It's all very fine to write verses about the caïque—and Leila's cheek—Leila had plenty of cheek if she wanted any one to go with her in a boat like that—"

"My precious darling!" cried the poor mother, pathetically busy with a feeble and ineffectual handkerchief. "You will get your death—and—and you must not try that boat again—the steam-launch or the tender must be here directly."

"I will not wait for either tender or steam-launch," she said, imperiously, and yet with a profession of good-humor. "Come, Ernest; come, Mr. Hitrovo; you must hold the boat steady until mamma and I get in; and then we will go out and hang about the foot of the accommodation-ladder until we can sneak on board without being seen. A bath in the Bosphorus—whew, but it begins to be cold—it's perfectly dreadful down my back."

So that was the end of this adventure, for the time being. But although such secrecy as was possible was practised on getting on board (most of the people, indeed, were now below, preparing for dinner), the story soon made its way through the ship; and so far from there being any laughter over a ludicrous incident, it seemed to lend a new and quite sentimental interest to the two figures that later on in the evening might have been seen at the *piano, the* one seated, the other standing with his violin at his

shoulder, while together they played a Fantasia on 'Carmen,' which they had found in some amiable person's portfolio.

Next morning found our impetuous Sappho in a whirlwind of eager anticipation; for there were to be great festivities in the town—a procession of the Sultan to the Mosque—a grand review of troops—and what not. 'Tambourgi! Tambourgi!' we heard her exclaiming; and that sounded alarmingly like an echo of the Major's muttered ejaculations; but we discovered it was only a quotation from her favorite Byron, for she went on with—

'Chimariot, Illyrian, and dark Suliote!'

The Major, by the way, came presently to us in a state of furious indignation.

"Of all the impudent creatures that ever breathed!" he said, in incoherent wrath, and with his turkey-cock face ablaze. "Absolutely shameless! Won't take the plainest hint!—"

"But who?—who?" one has to ask of him.

"Why, that madwoman — that poetess — that idiot — that frowsy, ugly, ill-dressed, elderly frump! She comes and tacks herself on to Lady Cameron — must join our party — the dear Major's military knowledge — quite playful and flattering, the antiquated old giggler! And her pug; oh, yes, she must bring that blessed beast too—she'll carry it all the time—not in anybody's way. Gad, I wish that growling little brute would bite me! I do honestly—actually and fairly bite me; for I'd snatch it out of her very arms, if she was shrieking like the Witch of Endor, and overboard the hideous little wretch would go the very next second—"

"Poor Phaon! But if she leads him by a string through the streets of Constantinople—those other dogs lying about the pavements—mightn't there be a chance of a scrimmage?"

A new light seemed to dawn on the Major: he laughed a ferocious, an unholy laugh.

"He'd get chawed up in an instant!—eh, eh! By Jove, that'll be worth seeing! I'll go and tell the madwoman we particularly want her to bring the little beast with her, and she needn't take the trouble to carry him—oh, no!—leading him by a string will be quite sufficient. What a grand idea!" And forthwith he turned away, with these base and treacherous designs in his brain.

Then we saw them leave for the shore, the Major wearing an

air of importance, being in charge of all those women-folk. The Dumaresqs were also going to see the Imperial procession, the young Russian accompanying them. Mrs. Dumaresq, it is true, seemed a little concerned that Wolfenberg was remaining behind, and expressed some timid remonstrance; but he made sufficient excuse; and, indeed, the poor lady was in the habit of leaving all arrangements in her daughter's hands.

"You may be sure of this, mamma," Amélie Dumaresq remarked, as she shook loose her dust-cloak and fastened her gloves, "that Ernest has something better to do than stare at squadrons of Turkish cavalry. Leave him to himself: the world will be the gainer. Come along: the tender is waiting." And thereupon she led the way down the accommodation-ladder, and stepped on board, and took her place among the other Orotanians. She looked up, and waved a little good-by to Wolfenberg: he raised his cap, and then turned away. Perhaps he was growing accustomed to seeing his guardianship of those two being gradually transferred into other hands.

On this second mission of inquiry we were more fortunate—singularly fortunate, indeed, inasmuch as the information we sought was volunteered to us, and that in a curiously accidental way. It should be said, however, that a list of the passengers by the *Orotania* had appeared in the *Levant Herald* of that morning; so that any one whom we might chance to meet, either at the embassy or elsewhere, was sure to know who our companions were.

"Hitrovo? Paul Hitrovo? Yes, it must be the same. Lying quiet for a time. Best thing he could do."

This was the first hint; and a mere expression of ignorance on our part was all the further question that was needed.

"Don't you know the story? Oh, well, it was hushed up in a way; an awkward scandal; but when once names are mentioned, it is difficult to get them withdrawn or forgotten."

"A scandal?" said Wolfenberg, quickly. "But—but perhaps it was not very serious?"

"Not as regards your shipmate; oh, no," was the light-hearted answer. "All that could be said against him was that he seems to have got into a very fast set—a sporting set—in Vienna—rather going the pace, I imagine. But the particular scandal was bad enough; very awkward incident; cheating at cards; a quar-

rel; a duel there and then, ending in nothing; and a suicide the next morning. A very ugly story altogether; but they tried to get it hushed up, because a nephew of the Grand Duke —— was of the party."

"But it was not Hitrovo who was caught cheating?" Wolfenberg interposed again.

"No, no; but he was there; and altogether I am not surprised he considered it prudent to slip away for a while and let things rest."

Wolfenberg looked immensely relieved.

"And that is all?" he demanded.

"It is all I ever heard of him. But you ought to have got to know him pretty well by this time on board ship?"

"Oh, yes, yes," Wolfenberg said, affecting a certain indifference. "Oh, yes, naturally. We get to know a little about every one on board ship—sailing together—constant association—naturally, naturally." And he put aside the *Levant Herald* and its list of passengers with a kind of careless air, as if the story that had been thus accidentally revealed was of little importance to him. But his eyes thereafter were thoughtful; and for some time he was silent—seated here at an open window, in the cool shade of an awning, high on the heights of Pera.

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## CHAPTER XI

### "OATS-PEASE-BEANS"

NIGHT had fallen; but Constantinople was all a blaze and glory of illumination; and over the black waters of the harbor burned the riding-lights of the ships and steamers—innumerable golden points of fire in the dark. Here on deck there were but a few dusky figures, hardly distinguishable save when they chanced to pass the open skylight of the saloon. And if any one of them had had the curiosity to peer over and look below? Well, there was rather a pretty sight visible there: the slim young Russian seated at the piano, and Amélie Dumaresq standing by him, pleased, interested, and *listening* with all her ears, as he began

to play, in a slow and graceful fashion, Tschaïkowsky's 'Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt.' The odd thing was that the moment Mrs. Threepenny-bit, standing by the skylight, recognized the air of the Russian love-song, she looked startled for a moment, and then she said, somewhat hurriedly, to Wolfenberg, who was talking to her,

"Shall we go a little way along—towards the wheel? There will be less chance of interruption." And he followed her obediently, probably little guessing at the real reason for her sudden retreat.

He had come to ask her advice. Ought Mrs. Dumaresq to be informed of what we had heard about Paul Hitrovo? His own opinion was that she should not.

"There is nothing so very terrible about it," he said—and he seemed anxious that we should all of us think well of this young man whom Amélie Dumaresq had so markedly taken into her favor—"an unfortunate escapade—something to be soon forgotten—and even if a young fellow has got into a fast set, well, it is easy for him to get out of it again. What is that?—no, I think the negative evidence is all to his advantage; and besides, haven't we plenty of opportunities of judging of himself from day to day? I don't see any definite reason why Mrs. Dumaresq should be anxious—should be at all anxious. Then, again, Amélie is one not easily blinded; she has clear perceptions; if she has been drawn to this young Russian, it must be on account of certain qualities that she recognizes and appreciates—"

"Do you think so?" said the small woman, gently—indeed, she had never overcome her half-declared and probably quite unreasonable prejudice against M. Paul Hitrovo. "I have seen some strange instances of infatuation—some that did not last long either. And in this present case I would wait. I would not make matters too serious. Perhaps she is merely amusing herself: girls often do on board ship—"

"No, no," said he, distinctly. "That is not her character at all. She is too thorough for that. It is real—whatever it is—and however it may end." He was silent for a little while. Then he said: "I may have been wrong all the way through. There are mysteries in human nature that are difficult to read. Haven't I told you that with all her splendid vitality and enjoyment of life, her eager spirits, her resolute self-confidence, she has at times

moods of profound despondency and almost despair? Have I never told you about her often sitting up till three and four in the morning, alone, and thinking? Well, I put that all down to the divine discontent of the artist—a constant seeking for that which cannot be found—a perpetual longing and restlessness—the creative faculty ever striving after some new thing. But I may have been mistaken. Perhaps it was that she felt her artist life to be only a part of her woman's life; and not enough. Perhaps it was some sense of incompleteness—some unsatisfied yearnings and instincts not understood by herself—the woman stronger than the artist, and demanding emotions, and sympathies, and associations which Art cannot give. I may not explain clearly: these are only vague speculations of mine. Perhaps I expected too much—counted on too much abnegation. After all, she is a woman; and 'contentment, like the speedwell, blows along the common beaten way.' Very well. So be it. Whatever promises to secure her happiness, that is the one thing; and my theories, and wishes, and hopes, connected with the artistic side of her life, must simply go to the wall—and welcome!"

He spoke so equably and firmly and dispassionately: it was as if he would have us believe that the possible change in Amélie Dumaresq's whole programme of existence could not affect him in any way whatsoever. But perhaps the woman to whom he was now talking could form her own guesses as to the slow agony of sleepless hours through which he had won to this forced and outward calm of renunciation. And she may have suspected that those tragic hours—solitary, dreaded, full of unspoken farewells to the cherished dreams and plans of years—were not yet done with, or likely to be done with. His tone was firm and strong and resolute; there was nothing but kindliness and thoughtfulness with regard to the girl herself; there was no mention of any interests or projects of his own: but he could not altogether deceive. This present companion and confidante of his had at times caught a look in his face, in his eyes, when he happened to glance towards Amélie Dumaresq and her new friend, that spoke of many things.

And on the very next morning she showed in a practical manner her understanding of the situation and her sincere and active sympathy. This, by the way, was an extremely brisk and lively

morning; the ship in general commotion; and Miss Penguin, our fiery poetess, the heroine of the hour. For it appeared that, on the previous day, when she and the other Orotanians were witnessing the procession of the Sultan on his way to the mosque, she had become enthusiastic over the splendid military spectacle, and had even developed some sudden impulse of loyalty towards the Commander of the Faithful himself; insomuch that when he drew near, greeted by the mournful howls of the soldiers, she called aloud to her companions:

"Three cheers from the Orotanians for His Imperial Majesty the Sultan!"

It was Peggy who told us this story. She said that the instant His Majesty heard the unusual sound—the ringing English cheer—he at once turned and looked, and smiled, and made the little dabs that form the Turkish salute. Nor was that all that came from Sappho's impulsive intervention. The Sultan, as it turned out, proceeded to make inquiries as to who the strangers were; and in the evening he was graciously pleased to send one of his aides-de-camp to invite them to inspect on the following day the treasures of the Seraglio, and also to visit the twin Palaces on the Bosphorus, the Asiatic Beyler Bey and the European Dolma Baghcha. And thus it was that on this busy morning we found a whole procession of the Imperial caïques coming out to the *Orotania* to carry away these favored folk. Very picturesque looked the long and slender and graceful boats: eight or ten rowers in each, with sun-tanned faces, snow-white costumes, and red fez; the oars, between the gunwale and the hand, puffed out for balance, like the cork butt of a fishing-rod indefinitely magnified. And, of course, the women were all eagerness to get away; there were wonderful tales of the bejewelled cups and vessels out of which they would take their coffee and sip jelly compounded of rose-leaves; there were still more marvellous stories of collections of precious stones that would cause all eyes to wonder. Sappho was particularly energetic: nay, had she not earned the right to exercise a little authority, seeing that all this had come about through her means? She entertained the handsome Aide-de-camp with much sprightly conversation, in quite sufficiently fluent French. She hinted to the Captain that he might ask that most courteous emissary and officer to dinner. She went to the Purser and begged him to get the bandmaster to play the

Turkish national air on the arrival of our guest or guests. And when she went down the accommodation-ladder, it was —— Bey himself who handed her into the first of the caïques; and we felt that Sappho had merited the honor, in spite of her pernicious rhymes.

Meanwhile, what of the others? Well, on this occasion there was no need to make up very definite parties; for this was to be a water-excursion, first to the Serai over in Stamboul, and then along to the Bosphorus; it was only when the hiring of the carriages had to be contemplated that we arranged who was to go ashore with whom. The Major, of course, was in dutiful attendance on Lady Cameron; and young Julian Verrinder, more modestly and shyly, hovered about the Juno-eyed maiden, who seemed afraid almost to look at him, such being her guilty consciousness of mind. Mrs. Dumaresq, at the last moment, seemed inclined to draw back; but she was instantly overruled by her daughter.

"Why, mamma, you know there is nothing in the world interests you so much as jewels!" she exclaimed. "And just listen to what Mr. Hitrovo says about the pearls and emeralds—two soldiers guarding a single stone! And who knows but that I might get some new idea, some Eastern idea, for the setting of my diamonds? I must have them re-set. I am quite dissatisfied."

"My dear child!" the mother said, in a frightened whisper. "How can you be so indiscreet! It was mad enough of you to bring them with you, but to talk of them, with all these strangers hanging around—"

"At all events, you're going ashore with us," the imperious young lady said, paying little heed to this admonition. "I would not miss seeing the Dolma Baghcha for worlds—it must be a perfect dream of Eastern luxury. Mr. Hitrovo, will you give mamma your hand?—"

We were the last little group at the top of the accommodation-ladder; certain of us looking forward not so much to palaces and gems and rose-leaf jelly as to the novel experience of gliding along in those graceful caïques. But at this moment Miss Dumaresq stopped.

"Where is Ernest?" said she to her mother. "I don't see him in any of the boats. Isn't he going with us?"

Well, we had not missed him either; but on turning towards the deserted ship, there was no difficulty in making him out; his was the solitary figure slowly pacing up and down by the wheel-box, and directing an occasional glance towards the now departing caïques. Amélie Dumaresq hesitated for a second. It would take some time to go and remonstrate with him, and persuade him; whereas those people below were waiting for her. She seemed annoyed and impatient; but at last she said,

"Oh, I suppose he wants to remain on board!" And therewith she went on down the accommodation-ladder.

Not so the small woman in whose ear Ernest Wolfenberg had been pouring his confidences on the previous evening.

"I will not leave him alone like that, it is too shameful!" she said, under her breath. And she turned to the third officer: "No, thank you, I don't think I shall go ashore—tell them not to wait."

There was another person adjacent who was only too glad to escape a dose of sight-seeing, and who welcomed the prospect of a quiet day on board with an exceeding joy. We should have the whole ship to ourselves; we should lunch with the officers; we should hear of many experiences in far lands—some of them, perhaps, approximating to the truth. And if the solitary man down there by the wheel chose to remain all day by himself, that also was at his goodwill and pleasure. But our Mrs. Threepenny-bit had imagined aright; hardly had the last caïque left the vessel's side when he came along and joined us.

"Not going ashore?" he said lightly. "Not at the invitation of the Sultan? Oh, you really ought to have gone: it isn't every one who is shown the treasures of the Seraglio Palace: a great honor, as I understand." Then he seemed to think that some explanation was necessary of his own conduct in separating himself from his friends. "As for me—well—you see, the Dumaresqs and I have travelled a good deal together—and—naturally they are glad to have fresher and livelier society—something new—the companionship of an old fogey like myself cannot be very entertaining."

"Ah, but you must not talk like that!" said she, warmly. "I know how Mrs. Dumaresq speaks of your constant kindness and your care of them; she is most grateful to you, and no wonder; and Amélie—"

There was the slightest quiver of his eyelids; but he did not raise his eyes.

"Amélie also," continues the small woman; "do you think she does not understand what she owes to your friendship? As for going ashore—why, she was looking everywhere for you—she was asking for you the very last thing before she left the ship."

"Well," said he, "since we are together again, and by ourselves, shall we return to those dark mysteries of existence that we left unexplored last night?"

He spoke smilingly; but that smile soon died away from his face; and his eyes looked rather tired and worn, and hopeless. Perhaps he fancied we might notice something of this in his appearance.

"I could not sleep well last night," he said; "and so I got up and walked about the deck. And I did not go back to my cabin. The sunrise was wonderful—the pale light behind the domes and spires—it was like a dream—something distant—something centuries distant, and unreal, like an Eastern story. And I had plenty of time for going over that problem again. Those quiet hours bring counsel. And it seemed to me that Amélie Dumaresq might fairly say to any onlooker—to any one a little bit concerned about her future—she might fairly say, 'The world has many artists; while I have but the one world and the one life to live in it.'"

We could surmise what had brought him up on deck for that lonely pacing to and fro, even before the blue-grey dawn had risen clear and trembling behind the tall minarets.

"If you have an artistic gift," he went on, in a kind of absent way—but we knew how nearly these apparently abstract speculations touched the one person in whom he was deeply interested—"even a great artistic gift—what is the obligation under which you lie of exercising it? Why should you be bound to exercise it? Take the case of a woman: which is her higher duty—the living fully and completely her own life, or the cultivation of what artistic faculty she happens to possess?"

"Could not both go together?" was the timid suggestion.

He shook his head.

"'The reed that grows never more again, As a reed with the reeds in the *river.*' *Art is inexorably* exacting. And I don't

myself see where the duty or obligation lies. If a woman perceives that the complete fulfilment of her life involves love and marriage and maternity, is not that the higher duty that she owes to herself, and owes to the world, as one might say, as well as to herself?"

"Mr. Wolfenberg," said this confidante of his, who has a rare courage when it is demanded of her, "may I speak frankly? You are simply inventing a lot of desperate excuses for what you fear Amélie Dumaresq is going to do: you want that to appear natural and inevitable and right; and you won't have it that she has caused you or any one disappointment by throwing over her ambition as an artist. You are bent on defending her whatever she does. But some one might reply to you: 'The world has plenty of wives and mothers: it is Amélie Dumaresq's duty to cultivate the exceptional gift she possesses' —and it is you yourself who have told us how exceptional that gift is."

His pale and thoughtful face flushed a little — though the home-thrust was not meant in any unkindly way. And indeed she went on to give him such comfort as her sufficiently nimble brain could evolve from the situation.

"I want you to remember this," she said, "that she has not yet definitely abandoned her artistic career, or taken up with any other. You are simply so devoted to her that you want to justify her beforehand, in view of any possibility. But is it likely she should all at once resolve to give up her painting, merely because of her making a new friend? Oh, no; surely not; but then, on the other hand, she is very much attracted by whatever interests her at the moment; and this new acquaintance amuses her, makes her curious, perhaps even tantalizes her through his indifference of manner: she is like a child with a new toy, incapable of thinking of anything else—"

But again he shook his head.

"Her nature is stronger and deeper than all that," said he. "She is at once tenacious and firm; no fear of consequences will deter her."

"A breath of cold wind sometimes awakens people who have been only partially mesmerized."

For a second he looked at her. But he had not the courage to *ask her* whence might come any such revivifying draught. Was

she hinting at that most perilous of all things—intervention and remonstrance and warning?

Yet who could have imagined there were any haunting problems of existence, or cruel searchings of heart, or indeed anything of care, or trouble, or perplexity, in any way connected with this radiant young creature when she came back in the afternoon, arriving at the head of the companion-ladder breathless, laughing, excited, pleased with herself and pleased with everybody, and altogether charmed and delighted with her experiences of the day? Nay, in her waywardness and gayety she chose to be petulant with her Russian friend; told him that she had heard from one of the Turkish officers the true story about Plevna; and declared her intention of standing up when the band should play the Turkish national air in honor of our guests. And when at length she went away to dress for dinner we conjectured that from her abundant store of diamonds—of which we had vaguely heard—it was the crescent ornament she would choose on this particular evening to shine in her raven-black hair.

This was our last night in Constantinople; and there was a little stir of expectation throughout the ship, for there were certain shore-acquaintances who were coming to dine with us and say good-bye. Those who were on deck beheld the lofty domes and speared minarets grow gradually darker and darker against the splendor of the dying day; a crescent moon of clearest silver hung high in the violet heavens; and as the twilight fell the twin red rays of the lighthouse that is known as Leander's Tower, over yonder at Skutari, burned strong through the dusk. It was during this interval of waiting (while the musicians, grouped round the newly-lit lamp, were playing a slow and sinuous-moving waltz) that our Peggy appeared, queen-like as of old. Yet she did not have her customary air of high and confident good-humor.

"Missis," said she, in an undertone, "I am glad Mr. Wolfenberg did not go with us to the Palaces to-day."

"What now, then?" said her friend.

"Well, I think that girl shows her partiality for her Russian acquaintance just a little too openly. She has eyes and ears for no one else."

"Peggy," said the other, rather sadly, "can't you understand why Wolfenberg *remained on* board this ship to-day? He has

nerved himself to face what he fears is inevitable in the future: what he cannot bring himself to face is the intermediate steps—the gradual process going on meanwhile. It is too much to ask of him. She is being taken away from him, and from all that they have planned together; you cannot expect him to look on as an unconcerned spectator. It must be torture to him: why should he not avoid it? I have been trying to reassure him as well as I could; and of course it is quite possible she may get cured of this infatuation; but in the meantime I can believe that, however he may conceal it, it is just tearing his heart in two to see her devoting herself to this man—"

"And yet you say Wolfenberg is not in love with her!" Peggy exclaimed. "Why, what is that but the maddened jealousy of a lover, a hopeless lover—what else is it?"

"I do not know—the whole thing is too terrible," replied her friend, with a sigh. And that was all she could say just then; for here were our guests arriving at the gangway, while at the same moment the tinkle of the steward's bell began to sound through the ship: so curiously are tragic things and trivial commingled in this bewildering phantasmagoria of a world.

Next morning found us entering the Black Sea; and for a while it seemed as if we were about to get a bit of a dusting before it was done with us. There was a stiff breeze blowing, with heavy squalls of rain; the long roll of the lurid waves was broken everywhere into whirling crests of white; the wind kept freshening up; and the *Orotania* plunged and swung and labored in a most unaccustomed fashion. To our modern Argonauts adventuring into the mysterious Euxine, it might have appeared that these unknown waters, dreaded of old, meant to keep up their ancient and evil reputation for cold and mists and storms. But the good fortune that had befriended us so far followed us hither also; as the day wore on, the bursts of sunlight became more frequent; the leaden-grey sea changed to a vivid blue-black, opaque and heavy with color; while the sky overarching that breadth of deepest indigo was clearing to a summer-like fineness, with flying shreds of cloud, palely opalescent, that the fierce sunlight seemed to be gradually eating up. It was quite a joyous thing this buffeting about, after the protracted spells of calm, so long as the inevitable promenade on deck did not precipitate *you into* somebody's lap. And the swift-rushing, dead-blue

waves, with their tossing crests torn into spindrift, were a welcome sight, and might have been even a noble and inspiring sight, but that our image-destroyer was again to the fore, apparently determined we should not have a single illusion left.

"Why, what rubbish it is," exclaimed Miss Dumaresq, in her cruelly downright fashion, "for people to talk about the great spaces of the sea—the immensity of the view—and poetical exaggerations of that kind! There is no immensity of view at all. On land there is, especially in a hilly country; at sea there is nothing of the kind. How far is it over to the horizon there? Not more than ten or a dozen miles, I suppose! But you can see fifty or sixty miles on land, when the hills are high enough—"

"Amélie," said Wolfenberg, "I fancy I have heard that you can see the Peak of Teneriffe, from the deck of a vessel, some hundred or hundred and twenty miles away—"

"Yes, because that is the land!" she insisted. "Of the ocean itself you can never see but a little bit—a little circle—a mere round gridiron."

She had her contention, of course. For one thing, Wolfenberg never contradicted her, or argued with her; he would merely throw out a little tentative suggestion now and again, to see if it appealed to her. But what especially struck us—all through this brilliant, tumbling, and tossing day—and while the west flamed dusky-red in the evening, with the promenaders on deck grown almost black—and as the night came suddenly upon us, with the young moon sailing through the violet heavens and sending golden-white reflections splintering across the waves—what especially struck us was that this resumed life on board ship seemed to have brought back Amélie Dumaresq to her old allegiance. Perhaps she had become conscious that during those days in Constantinople she had too obviously forsaken and neglected old friends for new; perhaps she had had time to reflect on Wolfenberg's being left alone, and had grown a little remorseful. At all events, she appeared determined there should be no more of those isolated reveries now; she entirely devoted herself to him; she was most affectionate. And it must be said that the Russian did not seek to interfere; nay, she was not one to brook interference; she was imperious in her ways; if she wished to have such and such arrangements, they had to be made. And

how easy it was for her to show her old companion favor! She called him 'Ernest:' there was no other man on board this ship whom she named by his Christian name. Wolfenberg seemed inclined to laugh a little at her, so serious was she, and assiduous; and yet perhaps it was pleasant to be petted and made much of by this charming and winning and brilliant creature, whose long-lashed, luscious dark eyes beamed, whose red lips smiled to show pearly teeth, whose finger-tips had a touch that thrilled. It was like old times for all of us: it was like the beginning of the voyage: we remembered the foreign-looking fascinating girl with the pale olive face and the magnificent black hair who had attracted every one's notice on the very first evening, and who had thereafter puzzled us not a little with her alternations of wilful self-assertion and childish playfulness. How long was it since she had taunted Ernest Wolfenberg with being Mr. Gloomy-Brows? How long was it since she had sat down to the piano—laughing—to tease him with her Spanish song:—

*'Out of reach and sight of man*
*I will keep me (if I can!)*
*For I'm but a little maid,*
*And of love I'm so afraid!'*

But this was not her mood to-night, when we were once more assembled in the saloon for dinner. Oh, no; now she was all anticipation about once more getting to work; she had found her subject—if he approved; she hoped she might be able to make of it something that would win from him at least a glance of commendation. As for the exhibitions?—she cared nothing for the exhibitions. As for the critics or the public?—she cared for neither the critics nor the public. It was for one whom she knew to be a true artist to say whether she had done well or ill: if ill, then there would be the fire handy—and oblivion—and a resolve to try for something better.

"And the subject, Amélie?" he said.

"'*Oats-pease-beans*,'" she answered.

"I beg your pardon?" interposed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, doubtfully—she being not very learned in folk-lore.

"Ah, perhaps that is not the English name; that is our American name," she explained. "It is a children's game—a kind of dance—a number of little girls joining hands in a ring—and they *have a rhyme* that they sing as they go round—

*'You and I and nobody knows*
*Where oats-pease-beans and barley grows.'*

"Oh, how very quaint!" exclaimed the elder woman, with evident interest. "And of course you will put them in a pretty meadow, in the spring-time, and they will be wearing chains of daisies and buttercups."

Now was there ever in the world a worse shot made! That any one who had seen any of Amélie Dumaresq's work, or even known herself and heard her talk, should have formed such a futile forecast seemed incredible; but we are not all of us wise at all moments.

"Oh, no, I mean to put them in Greenwich Street," the young lady replied promptly; and then, seeing that this did not much enlighten us, she proceeded to explain still further. "Perhaps you are not very familiar with the business part of New York city? Well, neither am I; but I know enough of it for my present purpose. For I should take this little group of children—squalid little brats that had wandered out of the slums—and I should make them play 'Oats-pease-beans' on the sidewalk in Greenwich Street at the very busiest hour of the day; and the subject of the picture would really be the different expressions of the various business men coming on this interruption of the traffic—with the absolute unconsciousness of the children, of course. Then look at the studies of character that might be brought in. There would be the hurrying man, impatient and angry, scowling and almost ready to box their ears; there would be the more human creature, stopping for a moment to look, and smiling—perhaps slipping his hand into his pocket for a stray quarter, though I don't know how I could paint *that;* there might be the entirely engrossed man, not seeing anything, but only vaguely aware of some obstruction and trying to avoid it; oh, there would be no end to the studies in human nature that you could bring in! And then, in the middle of all this commercial whirl and tumult, and in the middle of all those grown-up tempers and scowls, the small wretches, quite oblivious, prancing around with their

*'You and I and nobody knows*
*Where oats-pease-beans and barley grows.'*

I think that will be quite as idyllic as putting them in a meadow with young lambs and buttercups."

"And I think so too," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with decision: she might have known that Amélie Dumaresq was not likely to paint any pretty, conventional landscape.

"Well, Ernest," said the young lady, cheerfully, "what do you think—will it do?"

"If you *see* your subject in it, that is enough," he made answer. And then he said, with a smile: "It will be a test of your experience of human life, Amélie, quite apart from its pictorial qualities. What proportion of the grown-ups are you going to make ill-tempered and scowling?"

"Oh, I can't have it sentimental," she exclaimed at once. "No, I must have it true. And I won't go much by my own experience; only I imagine that nine men out of ten—or shall we say nineteen out of twenty?—if they were suddenly brought up by such an obstruction, would say something very like what the Major sometimes says when he thinks that no one can hear. What do you think?—do I judge too ill of my fellow-creatures? Well, I don't care, if it will make my picture the stronger. In fact, I think I will have the whole of those men angry and scowling and impatient—the whole lot of them—all of them, except one; and that solitary bystander must come in to strike the note of kindliness and human sympathy." She hesitated; looked at him with laughing and yet timid eyes; and then said, with a pretty confusion: "Ernest, you must be my model for that single bystander."

So that was all that we heard at this time about the *Oats-pease-beans* project; but naturally, taken in conjunction with her marked change of manner towards her old friend, it was not likely to be forgotten. On this very evening, when our women-folk had got into their snug retreat aft of the wheel-box (the wonder-world of the stars was all brilliant now; and there were glow-worm lights twinkling for a moment hither and thither on the tumultuous blue-black waves) Peggy at once said,

"Well, now, missis, what do you say to that? If she talks about returning to America, and getting on with her work, she can have no thought of marrying and settling down in Europe?"

"I rather distrust such very sudden conversions," was the answer. "And yet who knows?—she may be fighting against what she feels to be before her—trying to cling to old com-

panions and old ways. It is all a mystery to me. Only I wish Wolfenberg were out of it: I wish he had never come on board this ship."

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## CHAPTER XII

### UNWELCOME GUESTS

EARLY morning. A young man appears on deck—a young man of modest and prepossessing mien, with the least little bit of a light yellow moustache, just sufficient for finger and thumb in moments of nervousness. He comes forward shyly and timidly.

"Would you like to—to look at some verses?" he says. "Emily thought perhaps they might amuse you. She's awfully obliged to you, you know, for having made things easy for both of us; and Lady Cameron has been so kind, owing to your intervention. These are mere nonsense-verses, of course; but still—well, there is no harm in them; but Miss Penguin is rather trying at times, you know."

And so this bashful youth produces a half-sheet of paper with the following lines scrawled on it in a girlish handwriting:—

*I'm sick of Romans, Greeks, and Turks;*
*I'm sick of Homer and all his works;*
*I'm sicker still, I do declare,*
*Of Sappho and her Lemprière.*

*Pursue me over land and sea;*
*Embalm me in Arsinoë;*
*So I escape the awful scare*
*Of Sappho and her Lemprière.*

*I'd dwell in Zante's stifling heat;*
*I'd even drink the wines of Crete;*
*So I got safely anywhere*
*From Sappho and from Lemprière.*

*Drown me by Chios' sounding shore,*
*Or where Corcyra's surges roar:*
*Sweet Death, release me from despair*
*Of Sappho and her Lemprière.*

*Blow, Æolus, your fiercest blast!*
*Jove, send your red bolts hurtling fast!*
*Neptune, down to your oozy lair*
*Drag Sappho and drag Lemprière!*

Well, this is a sufficiently astonishing document. What has our cataclysmal and beloved Sappho done that she should be attacked in this gratuitous fashion?

"Most disgraceful! Who is the author of these scandalous verses?"

"I think one of the Smeeton girls—or both of them; but they're keeping it a profound secret," he says.

"No wonder. They ought to be ashamed of themselves. Have they no respect for age, and for the fire of genius, and the whirlwind force of tempestuous passion? Here, take the rubbish away. But wait a moment. You spoke of Lady Cameron. Would you like to find an easy way of propitiating her this morning?"

"Certainly—certainly," he says, with unmistakable eagerness.

"Do you know where we are, then?"

"I heard somebody say something about Cape Chersonese."

"That land over there is the coast of the Crimea. We are going on towards Kalamita Bay; and by and by we shall be opposite the Heights of Alma. Now are you aware that the Battle of the Alma was won by the 79th Regiment, the Cameron Highlanders?"

"Oh, was it?" he asks, suspiciously.

"You can say so. Indeed, you'd better whip down now into the saloon, before anybody is about, and secure Kinglake's 'Crimea' out of the library, and read up all about Colin Campbell and his Highland Brigade—but especially about the 79th Regiment. You will see how the Russians must have thought the earth was bearing giants when they beheld the Cameron Highlanders appear on the top of the hill, with their tall plumes waving; and you will see how the 79th advanced against the Sousdal Column, and 'caught the mass in its sin—caught it daring to march across the face of a Highland battalion—'"

"Yes, yes," he says, quickly and gratefully; and he is just about to depart on this quest for invaluable information when, lo and behold! here comes Lady Cameron herself; she is always one of the early ones.

"Good morning!" she says, pleasantly, to the young man.

"Good morning!" he answers, with a certain hesitation, for *apparently* he is undecided as to whether even now he should

seek safety and knowledge in the saloon. But then he might miss his opportunity altogether. "This must be a most interesting country for you to visit, Lady Cameron," he ventures to say. "I—I suppose you would like to land at the Alma, and inspect the battle-field—the battle-field where the Cameronians appeared on the top of the hill—"

"The Cameronians were a religious sect, Mr. Verrinder," she says, with a gentle smile.

"Oh, yes, of course," he says, hastily. "I mean the Cameron Highlanders—the famous 79th, of course—when they—when they rushed forward to support Soulsby's column—and—swept the Russians from the field. It must have been a proud day for your husband, Lady Cameron—to be at the head of such a fine body of men—"

At this she stares curiously.

"Mr. Verrinder," she says, "do you think my husband is old enough to have commanded a regiment at the Battle of the Alma?"

"Oh, no, no!" he exclaims, in dire confusion. "I meant—that is—every one knows the history of the battle—and the splendid part played by the Cameronian Highlanders—"

"But if I had been there on that day," she says, turning to another bystander, and good-naturedly pretending not to notice the young man's desperate blushing and embarrassment, "I think I could have helped. Yes, indeed. Do you remember that after the battle Sir Colin Campbell announced to the Highland Brigade that he meant to ask the Commander-in-Chief for permission to wear the Highland bonnet during the rest of the campaign?—and they could get nobody to make up the heckle of the bonnet until a young lieutenant of the Black Watch undertook it? I should like to have put a stitch or two in that bonnet; I just hate to think it was a man who had the making up of the red and white heckle that was to represent the whole brigade. Of course you know what happened two days after, when the parade took place, and when Sir Colin rode up, wearing the Highland plumes?—there was such a cheering that both the French and English armies were startled. It was a handsome compliment he paid to those three regiments; but they had well deserved it. You remember what he said to them before they went into action? *'Now, men,* the army will watch us. Make

me proud of my Highland Brigade.' And I think they did so."

And thus it was, in this easy and unconcerned fashion, she continued chatting, in order to cover the hapless youth's confused retreat into silence. It was considerate of her; but Peggy always is considerate, and generous, and kind: at this moment one thought it wiser to conceal from her those ribald verses about our dear Sappho—the probability is that she would have been hotly indignant.

Indeed, some little consideration and tact was demanded all round on this particular morning; for we had to remember that one of our fellow-passengers was a Russian. When Paul Hitrovo came on deck, we affected to regard those Crimean shores with indifference; and in point of fact the pale yellow coast-line we beheld beyond the heavily blue-black and swift-glancing sea was not very impressive. We steamed on until we were opposite the heights of Alma; but no one volunteered to give us information regarding the whereabouts of the battle. There seemed to be a disposition abroad to say, "Well, it happened so long ago, let's hope it isn't true." Amélie Dumaresq was the only one who would not join in this conspiracy of silence; not at all; compromise was not in her nature; she was openly denouncing the Crimean campaign as the most outrageously uncalled-for war that even a British Government had ever blundered—or slumbered—into; and she went on to say to her companion, who was no other than Hitrovo himself—

"I shouldn't at all wonder if the authorities at Sebastopol objected to our landing. How can they like it? It seems almost impertinent. The war is too recent; it isn't like the Battle of Hastings. And we shall be driving about looking at the ruined fortifications—"

"Oh, no, do not think that," said he, with a smile. "They cannot be so sensitive. And the fortifications are all rebuilt. Besides, this is not an English party exclusively: you, for example, you cannot have come to triumph. No; but what is more likely is this: my country is much given to over officialism, I admit it. You may have difficulty in getting ashore at Sevastopol—"

"Sevasto'-pol?" she interrupted. "Is that how you pronounce it?"

"Have I been so fortunate as to convey a little informa-

tion?" he said. "Yes; there is a good deal of officialism; each man wishes to make himself secure—to have authority for what he does: most likely they will telegraph to St. Petersburg for instructions. Sevastopol has always been jealously guarded—difficult for a stranger to get into; it was always so; and recently there has been a proposal to shut out all foreign vessels, keeping the great arsenal a great arsenal and nothing more. Well, perhaps we shall be allowed to land, perhaps not—"

"But you," said she, boldly, "why shouldn't you go ashore with the Purser, and make explanations, when he goes for pratique?"

"I?" said he, laughing. "I am nobody. The smallest official in such a place is a more important personage than I. It is true, I speak the language; and when the soldiers come on board—when the sentries are posted—I can give them a hint not to be too inquisitive about the ladies' cabins—"

"Soldiers?" said she. "Is the ship to be put under a guard of soldiers?"

"I think it is most likely," said he. "And then still further—well, you must not be too incensed, Miss Dumaresq; you come from a country where there is much personal liberty—little interference; but different nations have different customs—"

"What is it now?" she demanded, in her blunt way.

"Perhaps they will not insist," he said, regarding her with a little caution; "but if there should have to be a parade on deck—"

"Of the passengers?"

"Yes—it is the health regulations—"

"I will not be paraded!" she said, angrily. "Inspected like a lot of pauper immigrants? I will not! There must be an American Consul here—I will appeal to him—"

"If it is only a formality!" he said. "And a little good temper makes things go so easily."

"I will not be paraded on deck and inspected, as if I had just landed at Castle Garden," said she, very distinctly. "And they cannot compel me if I refuse." Then she suddenly changed her tone. "Well, I have no quarrel with Russia," she said. "If they want to make vexatious regulations because this is an English ship, it is hardly to be wondered at; only I will tell them that we Americans *should be exempt*. And, Mr. Hitrovo, we are going

to rely on you. You must be our interpreter. It is your country; you are receiving us; you must give us a courteous welcome."

"If I had the government of your reception, there would be little doubt about that," said he; and by this time we had turned round, and were steaming south again, towards Sebastopol and the far-receding and lofty and precipitous cliffs of the Chersonese.

Now, our preconceived idea of Sebastopol was of something large, and frowning, and lonely: towers and walls and batteries more or less in ruins, and all of a sombre hue—dark and half-forsaken in spite of recent reconstruction. But as we slowly steamed round the out-jutting bulk of Fort Konstantine (and surely we had some memory of the gallant Dacres, and his brave *Sanspareil*, and his three hours' defiance of yonder yawning casemates), and as we gradually opened out the inlet and spacious harbor of Sebastopol — a great breadth of bright-blue water shimmering in the sun—we found before us a most pleasant and cheerful-looking town, mostly of a brilliant cream-color, terraced along the southern shores; the houses of a French appearance, with green and grey verandas and sun-blinds; plenty of gardens and lawns attached to the hotels and bathing establishments; the overlooking heights surmounted by domed white churches; and beyond and behind, stretching away inland, lofty slopes of a softly ruddy hue, with from time to time a yellow cloud of dust being blown across the face of the Malakhoff Hill. No doubt there was everywhere around a sufficiency of armament. Over there was Fort Alexander, beyond Artillery Bay; behind us Fort Konstantine; in the north the huge mass of the Sivernaia; but Sebastopol itself appeared quite a gay, lively, attractive-looking place, with no gloom about it whatsoever. And this great harbor, too, was full of animation; signallings from ship to ship; drill going on on the decks of the portentous men-of-war; small despatch-boats hurrying hither and thither; torpedo-boats steaming out to open sea for practice. There were but few pleasure-craft, it is true: Sebastopol seemed busy and determined. Nevertheless, this blaze of color, both ashore and afloat, was grateful to the eye, and very different from what we had anticipated.

But as we lay here at anchor, during this long day, it gradually dawned upon us that we had adventured into a place where we were distinctly not wanted, and it appeared most likely that

every kind of obstacle would be thrown in the way of our landing, if we were permitted to land at all. To begin with, we were taken possession of by a number of soldiers, sentries being placed here and there about the deck and at the top of the accommodation-ladder. They were rather good-looking fellows, those bronzed men in their unfamiliar uniform of dark green and flat white cap; but what struck us as chiefly peculiar was the strangely-unintelligent look with which they stared at us strangers. Clear eyes they had, clear, light-colored eyes; but they regarded us with a blank, animal-like observation that was almost pathetic. Or was it that we felt there was between us the impalpable barrier of an unknown tongue? A French, or German, or Italian sentry would have been an ordinary human being: one might have offered him a cigarette—when his superiors had gone ashore; but these poor creatures seemed of an alien race altogether; they did not appear even to understand what their eyes told them. As for the officials who came to inspect the crew (for which purpose there was a general muster on deck), they were grave and courteous to a degree. And at last it turned out that there was to be no parade of the passengers: we were to be spared that dreaded and ignominious ordeal.

"We are all passed as sound," said the Major, buoyantly, coming up to Lady Cameron with the welcome news.

"Then they don't recognize incurable idiotcy as a disease?" said Peggy, looking him sweetly in the face. But we none of us knew what she meant.

Meanwhile, what was Hitrovo doing? Here was his chance. Here was his opportunity of distinguishing himself, of being able to do all of us a good turn—in, especial, of showing himself sensible of the marked favor that Amélie Dumaresq had bestowed on him. We were strangers; this was his country; and, as the day wore on, it became more and more evident that we were in urgent need of some kind of intercession. The people ashore could not understand who we were, or what we had come for. A yacht?—a yacht of nearly four thousand tons? And what was any sort or size of yacht doing with such an enormous crew? No cargo?—but that would have to be proved: there would have to be an examination. From what we could learn, the authorities in Sebastopol appeared to be telegraphing to higher authorities elsewhere, asking *how they* were to deal with this incomprehen-

sible visitor. The Purser and Doctor had gone ashore for pratique, certainly; but nothing seemed to come of it; and in the meantime we were prisoners, with those strange-looking sentries calmly and stolidly regarding us. Was it not for our Russian fellow-passenger and fellow-prisoner to come forward, and explain, and demand our release? We had no wish to wave the British flag over the battle-fields of the Crimea; we had no wish to make speeches, and form processions, and fire pistols, as they do on the other side of the Atlantic. We were a peaceful and harmless folk; we did not desire to look at a single gun or earthwork; we were ready to sign an undertaking that every Kodak camera on board should remain locked up in the cabins until our return, if we were allowed to land. There was not a single one of us who bore any grudge about the tearing up of the Treaty of Paris; probably not half-a-dozen of us could have recalled its provisions.

Well, our Russian acquaintance simply did nothing at all. He never did seem inclined to do anything, so long as he could lounge, and roll a cigarette, and have a charming young woman to talk to him and amuse him. Amid all this confusion and delay and doubt, he was down in the saloon, along with Amélie Dumaresq; and they were practising for the concert of the following evening. You could hear them as you passed the open skylight. Now it would be Wieniawski's "Légende," with piano and violin; or again he would be playing the accompaniment, while she sang—with such little voice as she had—'The Talisman' or 'The Cossack's Lullaby.' And so she was going to show her Russian proclivities by singing one of these Russian songs before our assembled Orotanians. But indeed that was not necessary. After her sudden, repentant making-up towards Wolfenberg, she had resumed her companionship with the young Russian in an almost too open manner. There was nothing more about 'Oats-pease-beans' and her return to America; it was 'Ah, those blue eyes, those eyes of blue,' or 'Loose and fickle was the band, Soon the ring fell from my hand'—and a constant occupation of the piano that the other amateur performers, anxious for rehearsals, grumblingly resented. And as for Ernest Wolfenberg?—well, he said it was but natural that Amélie should be interested in Russian music and in Russian songs, since *here we were* within sight of Russian shores.

But if peace and harmony and a happy forgetfulness of outward troubles prevailed in that hushed saloon, far otherwise was it in the smoking-room on deck, where two or three of our Orotanians were congregated together, sullenly or loquaciously indignant according to their various moods and temperaments. For the rumor had come along that our cabins were to be searched and all luggage to be overhauled; and this gratuitous insult to the English flag—as some of the wilder spirits made bold to term it—provoked a little heat. The Major, in particular, was furious. He kept marching up and down this confined space, making angry little ejaculations from time to time; and now there were no women-folk present to impose some trifling restraint on his language.

"I'm as peaceable a man as ever wore Her Majesty's uniform," he asserted; "but I'm somethinged if I allow any somethinged Russian to come into my cabin and pull my things about. What excuse can they have for such a monstrous impertinence? I'm not a somethinged bagman! I do not carry goods for sale. I don't want to take anything ashore. Something them, I don't want to go ashore at all! Why should any one go ashore? We knocked the somethinged sawdust out of the somethinged place five-and-thirty years ago: what on earth is the use of going to look at a lot of tinkered-up ruins? Shoving their ugly heads into a private cabin, when you don't want to take anything ashore?—God bless my soul, it is an unheard-of outrage—a monstrous outrage—that could only have occurred to a pack of half-civilized savages and Calmuck Tartars! They might as well rifle our pockets, and read our memorandum-books and diaries. I tell you if I find a somethinged scoundrel prying into my portmanteau or fingering my dressing-case, out he'll go neck and crop—and in double-quick time too!"

Evening fell. The outermost fort—Fort Konstantine—loomed massive and sombre against the ruddy after-glow; in the southern heavens the moon shone clear, and there was a long and trembling lane of silver across the now darkening bay; inland the twin lighthouses of East Inkerman and West Inkerman, one beyond the other, showed each a steady golden star.

Then came dinner; and in the brilliantly-lit saloon we forgot all about the adjacent land and our imprisonment. The ship had become our home; *it had its own* circle of interests; some of

us, indeed, would have been content never to have gone ashore anywhere. And on this occasion Amélie Dumaresq, who was in very vivacious spirits, was telling us all about the forthcoming concert—who were to do what—the difficulties of the organizers—the shyness of those who could sing, and the embarrassing offers of those who could not—and so forth. But the astonishing part of it was that our gentle, retiring, modest-eyed Baby had actually been persuaded into giving a recitation.

"Emily!" cried Lady Cameron, in remonstrance. "What do you know about reciting? You'll break down before all those people."

"They came and told me that every one was refusing," replied the Juno-eyed maiden, blushing very prettily and ingenuously, "and—and so I said I would do my best—"

"You?" said Peggy, again. "You stand up before a lot of people? What next?"

"If it is no secret," one interposed, "will you tell us what piece you have chosen?"

The Baby looked up rather timidly.

"'The Charge of the Light Brigade,'" said she. "I—I thought it would be appropriate—"

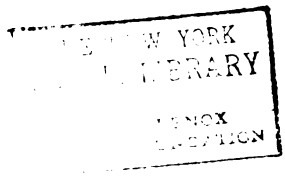
"My dear child!" said the elder sister, glancing quickly across the table to Amélie Dumaresq. "You forget. Suppose Mr. Hitrovo were to be present—"

It was curious to notice how instantly and naturally Miss Dumaresq undertook to answer for the young Russian—who was at another table.

"Oh," said she, with confidence, "you need have no fear on that score. Mr. Hitrovo is far too much a man of the world, too much of a cosmopolitan, to be very sensitive about such things. And besides you must remember that the 'Charge of the Light Brigade' was hardly what you would call a victory. Rather the reverse. A splendid blunder, no doubt, that the Russians admired as much as anybody; but it just about meant the destruction of the Light Brigade, so that it couldn't be quite a victory. I will answer for Mr. Hitrovo, Miss Rosslyn: if he hears you recite tomorrow evening, he will be the first to clap his hands."

After dinner, again, when one or two of us had repaired to our accustomed retreat aft of the wheel-box, we were to hear some*thing* more of that medley of an entertainment; for it appeared

THE MAJOR IN PARTICULAR WAS FURIOUS.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that our burning Sappho had agreed to take part in it, so that the event was assuming importance.

"I should not at all wonder if she wrote something specially for the occasion," Lady Cameron said, as she was idly looking across the black waters to the lights of Sebastopol. "I really do think that if you knew how hard she works, how desperately in earnest she is, you would have far more sympathy with her. She seems to consume herself in her eagerness to express powerful emotion. Why, I have seen her walking up and down in a kind of trance; and every time she passed me I could hear her saying to herself: '*Strong—strong—keep it strong—passion—fire—no slack moments—onwards—onwards—a white heat—no food for infants—the soul in revolt—flame—pressure—whirl—strong—strong!*' And do you think that was not consuming herself? Think what she herself must be going through all the time. Think of the cost of such a constant strain—the sword wearing out the sheath—"

"A substantial sheath! She weighs twelve stone if she weighs a pound."

"Really, I did not think envy could make you so mean! Why, you ought to admire and sympathize with her noble aspirations, even if you don't honestly like everything she produces. But wait till you see her novel!"

"Her novel?" And at this Mrs. Threepenny-bit also pricks up her ears.

"She has confided to me something about it," Peggy says, with an air of quiet dignity. "She has shown me the outlines. And I can tell you that English society will long remember the appearance of that book. The highest circles, the most exclusive circles, are to be exposed and denounced; their vices lashed and scourged; a mirror held up for those gorgeous, depraved, and ruined and conscienceless creatures to see themselves in—and shudder. And then, by contrast, the hero: a godlike Greek, seven feet high; owner of three Khanates, six hundred Ukraine thoroughbreds, and twelve chests of rubies and emeralds, each as big as a hen's egg; knowing all knowledge that has ever been known; capable of speaking thirty-three languages all at once, and strong enough to bite a horseshoe in two with his front teeth—"

"Peggy," says her nearest companion, in a low voice, "take care. Isn't that Miss Penguin along there by the skylight?"

"Ah," she continues, though in a more cautious key, "that will be a revelation indeed, when the glitter and tinsel of English society are torn off, and the fearful decadence and rottenness laid bare to the world. Wait till you see how English club-life has the truth told about it at last—its luxury, and selfishness, and heartlessness—"

"*Basta, basta!* It has all been done."

"Done? By whom?"

"By a countryman of yours."

"Which countryman of mine?"

"Mr. Maunder Bathos."

"I never heard of him."

"That also is possible."

"Who is he, and what is he, anyway?" she demands.

"He would probably call himself a man of letters. He writes for American newspapers and magazines. He is unhappily afflicted with a profound sense of his own provincialism; and finds relief, from time to time, in little outbursts of Anglophobia. Then he came over to England for a while—and that was his chance. He wrote a series of articles for a New York weekly journal, in which he described what he called the British Aristocracy, their haunts and ways, their appearance, their morals and manners, their cookery, their clubs, their wines. He drew a sad picture. The women were all outrageously plain. The men were supercilious, ignorant, and without an *h*. Go where you might amongst the gilded saloons of Mayfair and Belgravia, you could not see a single well-dressed man or woman. The cooking was awful: the food not fit to be thrown to pigs. The wines worse; the American connoisseur could not get a glass of Château Pommery or Veuve Lafitte that he could put to his lips. The treatment of servants was inhuman and cruel beyond credence: a Duke would get up at his own dinner-table and cuff the ears of the unfortunate 'slavey' until his guests had to interfere. The high-class clubs were nothing but haunts of frantic gambling; the outer doors were shut for hypocrisy's sake at midnight; but after that any one behind the scenes knew what was going on. Yes, the 'big life' in England caught it that time; and yet the curious thing was that while Mr. Maunder Bathos was describing the gilded saloons of Mayfair, and the evil looks and habits of the English upper classes and their infamous cookery, he was himself all the *while living* in lodgings in the Strand, taking his meals at a Fleet

Street restaurant, and picking up such casual acquaintances as he could at this or that American bar—the only people he met in England."

"Oh, well," says Peggy, doubtfully, "he was a stranger; and he had to do the best he could for the paper that commissioned him to write those articles. But Miss Penguin is an Englishwoman; she must know something of English life—"

"And English clubs. Did she call on her friend the housekeeper, and get shown through the empty rooms before any of the members came in for breakfast? And what can she know of the splendid profligacy of the English nobility—that dowdy old spinster going about nursing her hideous pug?"

Peggy rises to her feet—with a kind of a sigh.

"I cannot stay here any longer," she observes. "I think the earth ought to open—or the sea—or something. I'm going away down to the saloon, to listen to the rehearsals for to-morrow evening's concert."

And yet we were not long left alone—here in this spacious darkness throbbing with near and distant lights. It was Wolfenberg who presently came and took the place she had vacated. He was a solitary man; he had made few friends on board; perhaps his thoughtful eyes and his habit of absent contemplation were not conducive to the formation of chance acquaintanceships. But on this occasion at least he was sufficiently cheerful and communicative.

"I have just had a most pleasant experience," he said, in his quiet and gentle way. "And I must tell you. For it is something to be in touch with two young lives that have everything clear and auspicious before them; it is something to be able to look on; it is a beautiful thing; it is like the world grown young again. Of course, it is only a guess of mine; but, at all events, I am revealing no secret; for no secret has been confided to me; and my guessing can't hurt any one, whether it is right or wrong. Didn't you tell me that young Julian Verrinder—"

There!—we knew it would be out sooner or later. We knew some one would suspect—would make inquiries—would perhaps even question Lady Cameron herself; while those two young idiots, in their shyness, or fright of possible consequences, or in their guilty remembrance of past misdeeds, were fondly and insanely hoping that their secret might remain a secret for a quite indefinite time. But what was it that had aroused this dreamer from

his reveries, and brought back his attention to what was happening immediately around him?

"Didn't you tell me," he asked, "that young Julian Verrinder was very well off?"

"So it is said. He has recently succeeded to the family estates, and they have been nursed for a good many years by his mother, who has the reputation of being a shrewd-headed woman. So the story goes. And his uncle, who has no family, is one of the richest men in the House of Commons."

He considered for a moment or two.

"That makes me less certain," he said. "For a young fellow just come into a large property might be careless—ready to indulge in any kind of whim, however costly, especially where a pretty girl is concerned. But still—still—three hundred pounds cannot be quite a trifle to anybody; and three hundred pounds for a sketch in crayon—"

"A sketch of a young lady's head, perhaps?" suggests Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with downcast eyes.

"Yes; with some little bit of a background—the rigging, or what not—as a souvenir of the voyage—"

"And the young lady?" inquires this miniature Mephistopheles, with the most innocent air.

"Why, Lady Cameron's sister—Miss Rosslyn."

"Oh, really. Oh, indeed. Well, I am sure you will make a charming study of her, if you accept the commission," she says—for she is as silent and discreet as the grave when any of her young friends have confided their trumpery little secrets to her.

He shook his head and smiled.

"No, I cannot do that. I cannot encourage the boy to fling away his newly-found money. But I will try about a little, and see if I can find some suggestion: I had a look at her now and again this evening: once, towards sunset, when her face was in shadow, I thought there was something rather striking; there is a curious combination of youthful gravity and timidity with a certain largeness of manner and repose—something almost sibylline in the set of her shoulders and her neck and her great eyes: well, I will try about a little—it will be something to do if those Russians confine us to the ship. And if I can make anything of the sketch, then it will not be a commission: I will keep it by me—and give it to them as a wedding present."

He was silent for a second or two. Then he said,

"And if my guess is right, isn't it a beautiful thing to think of: those two young lives, with their way clear before them, no entanglements or burdens, the fates all propitious, youth and hope holding out both hands to them? And a beautiful thing for others to look on at, even if they have their hidden little mysteries and shyness: it will lend quite a new interest to our wanderings in this ship. That is, if I have guessed aright. Do you remember the first bird's-nest you ever discovered?—the startled eyes of the bird—and you just about as startled, and rather wishing to withdraw: well, multiply that a million times, and that is how you come upon a human secret, the secret of two young lovers, that they have been keeping concealed to themselves. And you would rather go away; yet you cannot choose but look—from a little distance—and surely with well-wishing eyes."

So he rambled on, in a curiously sympathetic and wistful kind of fashion; little suggestions here and there; fancies as they occurred to him; but nothing very consecutive. And more and more of late he had got into the habit of talking as though all the interests of life were over for him; as if the future held nothing for him; as if he were a mere onlooker, apart and isolated. Not angry, nor resentful, nor disappointed: only standing by himself, alone. And this man, so solitary, so unselfish, so uncomplaining, seemed also so grateful for any little friendliness—for even this opportunity of aimless confidential chatting—that the person whom he chiefly addressed had not the heart to tear herself away. She lingered long; she said such pretty and kindly things as she could; she tried to convey to him that he must have many friends. But when at length she went below, to the privacy of her own cabin, her mood changed.

"Yes," said she—and there were proud and indignant tears in her eyes—"it is all very well for him to put so brave a face on it; and to keep silent; and to pretend that he is well satisfied to play the part of a dispassionate and unconcerned bystander. To listen to him, you would think he had no sense of having been forsaken, or put aside for new friends, or anything of the sort: he has had his day; the world is for young people; and he is glad it should be so. Very well; he has plenty of courage for anything; he is not *one likely to pity* himself or to ask for pity. And yet,

all the time he was talking, how could I help thinking of that woman down there in the saloon—that laughing and heartless creature, with her Russian and her sentimental love-songs?"

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## CHAPTER XIII

### "GOD SAVE THE CZAR!"

SUDDENLY the silence of the dawn is broken by a shriek—a shriek so shrill and piercing, so terrible in its import, that we can associate it with but one tragic deed. Surely, the Major has borrowed a sabre from one of the sentries and slashed off Phaon's head? But when one hurriedly—and discreetly—peeps forth, it is another warrior who is seen to be disappearing round a corner—a military gentleman in a green uniform, with a broad, flat, white cap; while over there at the door of her cabin stands Sappho, in a hastily-donned dressing-gown, her hair untidy, her cheeks aflame.

"Who is that man!" she exclaims, in tones of vibrant indignation. "I want to know which of them it is: I will appeal to the Captain: it is monstrous that Englishwomen should be insulted by these savages—"

But, behold! even as she speaks, her enemy returns; and he is accompanied by other two of his kind—all bronzed, bearded, serious-eyed, silent, and observant. At the sight of this overwhelming force, Sappho hesitates for a second; probably thinks it useless to put her wrongs into words; then, with a withering look of scorn directed upon all the three culprits, she retires into her room, slamming the door after her.

Hers is not a solitary experience. For the fact is, that the whole blessed ship is simply swarming with Russian officials on this bewildering morning: officers and soldiers in every sort and color of uniform, prying, searching, secretly confabulating, poring over lengthened documents, or standing sentrywise and solemn, with a dull and hopeless stare; while, as the ladies appear at breakfast, one after another has the same angry tale to tell of a bearded and white-capped head having been thrust into *her cabin* while she was dressing, or even before. And as the

morning passes, matters do not mend one whit. Those grave persons in uniform, some with spectacles and some without, seem unwilling to do anything. They may be too polite to say so, but it is easy to guess that they would be very much pleased to see us weigh anchor and get clear out of the place. We are strangers, and, therefore, to be dreaded. Indeed, it is odd to think that the disposition towards a mysterious secrecy, and the suspicion and distrust of visitors, which Laurence Oliphant described years and years ago—before the Crimean campaign, in fact—as pervading the officialism of Sebastopol should still prevail there. More than that, as the time goes by, rumors reach us that our mere presence in the harbor is provoking some ill-feeling ashore among gentle and simple alike.

"And what could be more natural?" demands Amélie Dumaresq, who has blossomed out into a full-blown Russomaniac. "I can quite understand how they should be resentful. What have we come for but to look at battle-fields?"

"There are one or two of us who have come to visit the English graves," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, in her gentle fashion. "There can be no objection to that, surely."

But the young lady is not to be persuaded out of her partisanship.

"Even if that is so, how are those people ashore to understand? They must consider us merely a crowd of English come to gloat and triumph. It is not at all surprising that they should be indignant. And it seems to me the Russian officials have treated us with the greatest consideration—"

"In keeping us prisoners?" Wolfenberg interposes, laughing.

"No, but in excusing us the muster on deck," she says. "This is one of their chief naval stations, and of course they are afraid of infection being brought in by strange ships. I should not at all wonder if they imposed a fortnight's quarantine on us—"

"Oh, good gracious!" exclaims Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with alarmed eyes. "I'm for running away, as fast as ever we can go!"

"And supposing you have caught a Tartar, who won't let you?" one asks of her—and a kind of awful gloom settles down on the group.

Meanwhile, if we were condemned to an enforced idleness, the scene around us, *outside the Orotania*, was busy enough. A con-

stant activity prevailed in the spacious harbor; ponderous men-of-war and agile torpedo-boats were steaming hither and thither —the officers scanning us curiously as they went by; while ever and anon a ship's cutter, with reefed sails—for there was a stiffish breeze blowing—would slash along under our stern, the sun-tanned, clear-eyed occupants gazing up to see what they could see of the English captives. But our durance was not to last forever. In spite of all delays and obstacles and hesitations, our indefatigable Purser still persisted; and eventually, as the day wore on, he triumphed. What means he employed to smooth away opposition can only be conjectured; but a casual observer might have noted that a good many of those Russian officials were conducted into the saloon, while the steward in attendance was kept coming and going. Whether any more substantial form of persuasion was resorted to it is useless to inquire; all ended in amity; the announcement was bruited abroad that we were free to land when we chose; and not only that, but a far more astounding piece of intelligence made its way through the ship—we were to give a ball on the very next evening, to which the Russian officers and their wives were to be invited! Here indeed was a triumph of patience and good-nature. All of a sudden we had become friends. There were no more angry protests against cabin-doors being opened by too inquisitive officials. The only question that now remained was whether we had any champagne sweet enough to offer our guests when, on the following night, they went down into the saloon for supper.

And instantly the torpor that had so long prevailed on board the *Orotania* was changed into an alert despatch; parties being hastily formed; the women rushing off to get ready; the steam-launch being brought round; one of the ship's boats hoisting sail for a water excursion to Inkerman Bay and the mouth of the Tchernaia. Amid all this bustle and confusion, Paul Hitrovo remained indifferent; and when Amélie Dumaresq and her mother appeared, it turned out that he hardly thought it worth while to go ashore.

"What is there to see in Sebastopol?" he said, with a careless smile.

"There is Russia to see!" the young lady said, with indignant eyes. "Not go ashore? But I insist. It is your native country —you must be there to receive us—"

"Oh, if I can be of any service," said he, with great politeness, "then it is different." And therewith he took the two ladies' sunshades from them, that they might get down the accommodation-ladder unimpeded.

And Wolfenberg? Well, he lingered behind a little, hesitatingly, looking after them. To be sure, he might have gone with them: there was plenty of room in the steam-launch waiting below. And if they did not specially and pointedly ask him, was any invitation necessary? But just at this moment Mrs. Threepenny-bit came adroitly forward: her quick eye had noticed his uncertainty—perhaps, also, something else in his look.

"Mr. Wolfenberg," said the little woman, in her kindest and most insinuating fashion, "don't you think it is too late in the day to do anything? The ship will be so pleasant and still when all those people have gone."

He turned to her with obvious gratitude; this offer of companionship was friendly and sympathetic. He said that a quiet afternoon on the deck of the empty ship would please him better than anything. But might it not be put to some use, too? Over there was Miss Emily Rosslyn, standing talking to the third officer: could she not be induced to remain on board, and he would fetch up materials and begin the sketch that young Verrinder had set his heart on? Now nothing could have given our Archschemer greater delight than to be intrusted with this mediation —a mediation in favor of two faithful lovers!—and so it came about, in a very short space of time, that while Lady Cameron, and the Major, and Sappho, and the pug (with its head not yet shorn off) had all set off for Inkerman Bay, the Baby—the solemn-eyed Baby—timid, fearful, and conscious of the desperate perils environing her—was here with us on the quarter-deck; and young Julian Verrinder, under some pretence or another, had also stayed behind.

It was a pretty spectacle that those two young folks offered; and was, perhaps, as interesting to some of us as the ruins of Inkerman or the streets of Sebastopol. For while Miss Emily seemed embarrassed and a little bit frightened—being, no doubt, well aware that, if the ultimate destination of this picture were to become known, her dreadful secret would at once be suspected—Julian Verrinder, quite careless as to that, could not conceal his joy that the priceless *sketch had at last* been begun. He waited humbly

and assiduously on Wolfenberg, lest the easel should want shifting, or some little service of that kind be required; and he was most solicitous that not a sound should distract the artist's attention.

"For goodness' sake, quartermaster, don't make such a noise with those chairs! Can't you leave them where they are?"

Then one of the younger officers, finding himself in idleness, opened the deck-piano, and began to play "Home, Sweet Home." It is a plaintive air; but it loses some of its effect when performed slowly and hesitatingly with one finger. Verrinder went to him—

"I say, Kingston, I wish you'd stop. You don't mind, do you? The fact is, Mr. Wolfenberg is engaged in a rather important piece of work." And then he returned to the neighborhood of the easel, where those beloved outlines were gradually being transferred.

Meanwhile the artist was good-humoredly trying to convey some confidence to his sitter. Guessing at the origin of her embarrassment, he was pretending that this was not a portrait at all.

"It is very kind of you to become my model," said he, "though I don't know whether there may be any result. I must wait for some suggestion. Perhaps a head of Bellona would be the most appropriate among all these forts and guns."

But this proposal entirely alarmed the younger man. It was a portrait he wanted—and he was willing to pay £300 for the same. What to him was Bellona, or any other goddess, save this present and all-incomparable one?

"Bellona?" said he, anxiously. "But—but—a likeness?—an absolute likeness at the same time? Oh, yes, any imaginative subject you like, Mr. Wolfenberg—only an actual likeness, that any one could recognize? The fact is, I want to have it photographed—and—and enlarged copies made; there are several people in England to whom I should like to give one. And do you think Bellona is a good idea? Of course, if you see it that way, it is sure to be splendid—but—but I should have thought something more gentle—something more gentle and winning—would be more characteristic. Of course you could make Miss Rosslyn look very noble and fine—of course you could do that—but I should almost prefer a likeness that I could show to a stranger—"

"I am not a portrait painter," Wolfenberg said, pleasantly. "I'm only a kind of experimentalist, and I must wait to see what

JULIAN VERRINDER COULD NOT CONCEAL HIS JOY THAT THE PRICELESS SKETCH HAD AT LAST BEEN BEGUN.

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Miss Rosslyn herself may grow into. In the meantime, I must ask you not to make personal remarks about my model; for that brings unnecessary color into her face."

"Oh, I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon!" said he, abjectly; and he withdrew a foot or two—so that the precious work should not be interfered with.

It was a tranquil afternoon. For while we did not seek to know how the portrait was progressing (and it would have been impertinent to look), it was enough for us to sit under this awning and listen to Wolfenberg's curiously interesting talk: talk that consisted of disjointed sentences, with no kind of effort or display about it, but that nevertheless was singularly attractive through the transparent sincerity of the speaker. These random observations about what he had seen in the world were so obviously honest; sometimes, too, they had a certain quaintness and originality; certainly they were unpremeditated, suggested by anything of the moment. A gull chanced to fly past. Didn't it seem a simple thing that an animal should sustain itself in the air, and choose its way of flight? Yet, who could have imagined such a thing beforehand? Wasn't Mother Nature an extraordinary inventress, constructing creatures to live in the most impossible conditions? If the human intellect had been asked to devise animals that could exist under the ground, or in the sea, or suspended over our heads, wouldn't the answer have been a smile at such an absurdity? And so forth. His talking was merely an accompaniment to his work; but it was sufficient for his companions. And he spoke cheerfully, too. Had he forgotten those who had gone away ashore? At all events, if Mrs. Threepenny-bit had offered him her society out of some occult compassion, he seemed to be sensible of her kindness. Ship-acquaintanceships are mostly superficial; but in this case there was something more; and she, on her part, made no secret of the great liking and esteem and sympathy she had for this man. If only she could have seen forward through the next few months.

With the approach of dusk the wanderers returned; and so quickly thereafter came the night that the usual before-dinner tramp on deck took place in moonlight—the women, in their summer-hued costumes, passing up and down like mysterious ghosts under the shadow of the awning. But a stranger spectacle than that was *unexpectedly* revealed to us. We had been looking

across the dark water to the still darker town, where, on a height, there was a domed church that was almost black against the violet-blue of the moonlit skies, when all of a sudden that sombre building sprang into a silvery whiteness, and shone spectral there above the surrounding gloom. It was a marvellous sort of thing, this strangely brilliant dome hung high up in the heavens; but, of course, we soon divined the origin of this phantasmal illumination —the search-light of the Admiral's ship had struck that lofty church. And then again, and quite as suddenly, the dome was black; while the long shaft of radiance ran out in another direction, lighting up with startling distinctness the hull and rigging of a large steamer. No doubt it was all quite serious—probably part of the drill that seemed to be continually going on; though perhaps it looked a little like playing practical jokes. In any case, we were now summoned down to dinner.

And here again the search-light played its part, and that in an almost miraculous manner. For we had hardly got into our places when it became clear that Amélie Dumaresq had returned from her little trip ashore in a perfect madness of enthusiasm about Russia and everything Russian; and as she was a very assertive and impetuous young person, and would insist on all of us agreeing with her, it was perhaps just as well to "jouk and let the jaw go by." How she could have learned anything about Russia by looking into a few Sebastopol shop-windows was not easily discoverable, and indeed was not of much consequence; it was the length to which she carried her prepossessions and opinions that appalled us.

"For my part," she said, with rather a proud air, "I admire a country that has got a distinct nationality, and a definite place in history, and a definite aim before it—a country of a unanimous people, with a single and all-powerful head, whom they are ready and willing to obey without a question. That is a country that obtains respect; it may be unfortunate or mistaken, but it has done its best; you cannot but admire its singleness of purpose, its patriotism, its community of sentiment. Why, they talk about our freedom at home—but what does it amount to?" (And it was here that blank dismay began to fall upon us.) "The United States are not a country at all; they are not a nation; they are only a collection of big parishes, all hating each other, and *jealous of* each other, and having separate interests. It was the

North and South, last time, that were at each other's throats; next time it will be the West and East. As I say, we are not a nation at all; we have no national interests, no national purpose, no national speech—for the Germans, and Italians, and Irish won't let us have such a thing; and all that we can do is to sit on our parochial fences and spite each other at a game of brag. That is not to belong to a country—"

Here she stopped. For of a sudden there was a most unearthly glare; and instantly all eyes were turned to the starboard ports which, hitherto black, were now gleaming with a strange, phosphorescent blue. The next moment those round holes were black again; the Admiral's search-light had been withdrawn.

"Yes, no wonder you were frightened," Lady Cameron said, with a demure smile, to the young lady opposite her. "Weren't you expecting the heavens to open, when you were saying those dreadful things? It should be a warning to you. I am not a very enthusiastic American myself, since the West Highlands became my second home; but really, Miss Dumaresq, to compare the United States with a semi-barbarous country like Russia—"

"No, I will not have a word said against the Russians," interposes the domineering small woman who is our final arbiter in all matters, and who, by good luck, generally makes for peace. "We are going to receive them as our guests to-morrow night, and everything is to be as pleasant as pleasant can be. There is to be universal consideration. They are not to put in a word of objection when we drive to-morrow to Lord Raglan's head-quarters, and to the English Cemetery, and to Balaclava; and in the evening, when they come to the ball, we are all to be the best of friends. The little unpleasantnesses of these last two days are to be entirely forgotten."

"That's all very well now," says Peggy; "but at one time, Missis, things looked rather serious. I thought the English gentlemen on board were going to call a meeting and pass a resolution. That would have been serious, wouldn't it? For an Englishman doesn't call a meeting to pass a resolution unless he's driven to it; but when he does—! I've a kind of idea that if Adam had been an Englishman, the moment he was turned out of Paradise he would have called a meeting—he would have called a meeting of Eve—and then passed a resolution declaring the recent proceedings to be quite unjustifiable."

"Peggy, do you want to be sent to bed?" says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, severely.

"No," she makes answer, with much meekness. "I would rather sit up for the concert, please."

Now, amateur entertainments on board ships are pretty much alike; but on this occasion there were certain exceptional features that more particularly appealed to, and unmistakably interested, our small circle. One of these was the still further development of Russomania on the part of Amélie Dumaresq. She made no concealment about it whatsoever. Did she imagine that the mere neighborhood of Russian shores would be a sufficient excuse for her choice of Russian songs and music; or was she grown blind and reckless in her infatuation? At all events, the poor distressed mother, who had but little control over this perverse daughter of hers, came to us when we had all gone on deck to let the stewards clear the tables in the saloon; and there was not a little piteous anxiety and even alarm in the sallow-complexioned and yet rather attractive face and in the sad and troubled eyes. It seems that she had got one of the written-out programmes; and here was Miss Dumaresq in open and constant association with M. Paul Hitrovo—almost in defiance, as it were, of what our small public might choose to think.

"What am I to do?" said the poor woman. "She is so wilful. She will not pay heed to any remonstrance from me. I am afraid it would only make her go and do something worse. But look at this—Russian songs—Russian instrumental pieces—and always with those two together. Don't you—don't you think it is very indiscreet? And if I were to say so to her, she is so proud, she would—oh, I don't know what she wouldn't do! She would consider it a challenge. She would wear Russian colors at the ball to-morrow night—I am so afraid of what she might do! But couldn't you interfere?" And here she turned to Wolfenberg, who happened to be standing with us. "She always listens to you. She would take your advice before the advice of any one; she values your good opinion so highly. And there are still a few minutes; you might tell her how it will make people talk to see her given over to Russian music, and playing in those concerted pieces with Hitrovo: there are not many programmes written out—they could be altered even yet—"

"But why—but why?" said he, gently. "Don't you think

Amélie has quite good reason for what she has done? She and Hitrovo are far and away the best executants on board this ship: it is but natural they should perform together. And as for a Russian song or two, why, we are in Russia, you know. And if she has been a good deal in Hitrovo's society, isn't that natural, too? They are both fond of music; both young; seeing much of each other, day after day; and these companionships are the commonest feature of a voyage—"

"But the people generally—what will they think?—what will they say? They may even consider it indelicate—this open parade!" said she—her trembling apprehension breaking in upon his good-natured assurances. "I never thought that Amélie would make herself the talk of any ship—"

"She will not do so," said he, with some air of quiet authority. "What she has done is perfectly within her right. If there were to be any remonstrance, well, she is independent, and proud, as you say, and then she might do something unwise. At present no one would be justified in saying a single word against her—not any one."

At this very moment Amélie came quickly along from the companion-way, and put her arm within her mother's arm in the most affectionate fashion.

"Come along, Mimsey," said she, drawing her mother towards her. "Everything is ready; and you must be there to support me, and secure a good audience for me. I will say to myself 'Courage—courage—Mimsey must not be made ashamed.'"

And therewith all of us filed below and took our seats in the saloon, which we had come to regard as a very snug and cheerful and comfortable place. One could gather, if expression means anything, that this audience was willing to be pleased.

And indeed the various items in the programme were got through most creditably, the instrumental music being especially good; and if Hitrovo and Amélie Dumaresq led off with Liszt's "Rhapsodie Hongroise," and if she sang "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" to his accompaniment, and if again they played together Wieniawski's "Légende,"—well, this public association was only what might have been expected from their previous and constant companionship. The mother looked perturbed and distressed; perhaps the warm applause that followed these performances was some slight consolation. But in this matter of general and hearty

approbation, who could have foreseen that it was the shy, Juno-eyed maiden who was to bear away the bell? The poor Baby!—she was all trembling when it came to her turn.

"Will you go up to the head of the saloon," young Verrinder asked of her, in an undertone, "or stay where you are?"

"Where I am," she answered, almost inaudibly, and therewith she rose, for the master of the ceremonies had announced the recitation.

She was terribly nervous; but there was something in this trepidation that seemed to catch the sympathies of her audience. It was in an uncertain voice that she began

'Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.'

—and no doubt it was the wish to give the timorous young thing every possible help that caused the intensest silence to prevail. As for Julian Verrinder, who had taken the seat next her, his anxiety was something dire to look upon. He dared not lift his eyes. He kept twisting his programme into all kinds of knots, his fingers shaking the while. And meantime the poor Baby, the burning flush in her cheek still visible, was struggling bravely with her task, and doing none so ill. She was rather breathless, it is true; and she had no elocutionary gifts whatsoever; but she was young, she looked winning in her very shyness and timidity, and she was certainly among well-wishers. Only once did she falter. She had begun the fourth stanza—

'Flash'd all their sabres bare,'

when there was a brief and desperate moment of hesitation; and we thought all was lost. But at the very same instant young Verrinder, still with eyes downcast, prompted her with the next line; and from thence she got safely on to the end. Nay, was there not some mild little effort at emphasis when she exclaimed,

'O, the wild charge they made!'

At all events, this simple, school-girlish recitation had entirely won the hearts of the friendly audience; and when she modestly sat down again, there was enthusiastic applause; while Peggy, though not ordinarily a very emotional person, could not conceal

from us that she was wiping away tears from her lashes. For the Baby had come to be a kind of pet of this ship; and there was something that appealed to popular sympathy in her standing alone and struggling with her evident nervousness; and we were all of us immensely relieved and delighted when she got successfully through the ordeal.

There was a very different story to tell when Sappho (after an interval of music) rose to bestow on us another recitation. Small need was there for concern or disquietude on the part of anybody. Miss Penguin left her seat, marched up to the piano, and turned and faced the assemblage. Resolution was in her air; and an attitude of defiance in the somewhat dumpy figure. She meant to show us that she knew how to deal with us. It is true that a divine poetess should have been dressed in a simpler manner—in a costume of white and flowing robes, or something of that kind; whereas Sappho's gown was almost gorgeous both in design and color; but after all genius must be allowed its little eccentricities. And we had no time to think about plaits and furbelows when her commanding and scornful voice thundered out the opening lines of 'Old Morgan at Panama'—

'In the hostel-room we were seated in gloom, old Morgan's trustiest crew;
No mirthful sound, no jest went round, as it erst was wont to do.
Wine we had none, and our girls were gone, for the last of our gold was spent;
And some swore an oath, and all were wroth, and stern o'er the table bent;
Till our chief on the board hurl'd down his sword, and spake with his stormy shout,
"Hell and the devil! an' this be revel, we had better arm and out.
Let us go and pillage old Panama,
We, the mighty Buccaneers!"'

This was something! There was no pretty shyness here; no mild appealing of maiden eyes; no young man twisting his programme into nervous knots. We were on firm ground; Sappho had planted herself four-square, as it were; she was going to have it out with us. And she did—to the bitter end: though, to be sure, when the aggressive voice at length ceased, there was no such tumultuous acclamation as had greeted the Baby's bashful effort. Nevertheless she had done her part; she had given us of her best; and, when she returned to her seat, we bore her no ill-will.

Such were one or two features of this uneventful evening that were of more immediate interest to us; but the most striking incident of all occurred right at the close. Originally, when the programmes were drawn out, it had been arranged that the performances should wind up with the singing of "Auld Lang Syne." But a patriotic English lady declared that neither she nor her daughters would have anything to do with these proceedings unless they were to terminate, as was fitting in an English ship, with "God Save the Queen;" and as this objection seemed reasonable to the framers of the entertainment, "God Save the Queen" was added. Accordingly, at the end of the evening, we all of us, Americans included, stood up, while that rather lugubrious air was being played. And thereafter? Well, naturally there was nothing now save a decorous withdrawal. But there is a sort of solemnity about "God Save the Queen;" people do not hurry away the moment it has been played, any more than they hurry out of church the instant the service is over.

And it was during this brief pause, while all of us were standing, and only one or two had turned to the door, that Amélie Dumaresq, with something of a firm and proud expression about her mouth, went quickly along to the piano, and sate down, and struck the keys with the full weight of her hands. There was instant attention. One recognized these powerful chords: here was something finer than "God Save the Queen." For who can deny that the Russian Anthem is by far and away the most majestic and impressive of all these national airs? In dead silence she played—played with a massive grandeur of expression worthy of her theme. Nor was that all; for presently we could hear in the hush of listening that she was singing the hymn. She had not much of a voice, certainly; but she had courage; and her resolute intention counted for something. We could make out well enough what she had to say to us—

'Lord God, protect the Czar!
Powerful and mighty:
May he in glory, in glory reign!
He is our guiding-star,
Sovereign in peace and war,
Our faith's high Protector,
God save the Czar!'

There was no laughing bravado this time when she rose and came

away from the piano. The natural pallor of her face was increased almost to ghastliness; her lips, too, were pale; her eyes had a strange look in them. And she seemed to hang back a little from mixing with the crowd. But Hitrovo went forward to her, and extended his hand.

"I thank you," he said.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### L'ENTENTE CORDIALE

THE poor mother was well-nigh out of her mind.

"What will they think of her—what must they think of her!" she exclaimed, when next morning she found an opportunity of confiding to us her dire distress. "And she is so wilfully blind; she has such a disdain of public opinion; she will not see that she has openly compromised herself—"

"She has not compromised herself," said Ernest Wolfenberg, gravely. "That is not a word you ought to use, Mrs. Dumaresq, when you are speaking of Amélie." And then he went on in a lighter tone: "Why, the singing of the Russian National Anthem was only a compliment to the country we happen to be in. From the first it ought to have been included in the programme; it was very good-natured of Amélie to step in and repair the blunder. No one else had the courage; but she always has courage enough for anything."

"But what will they think; what will the people think?" was still the piteous cry.

"They must be left to think what they like," he made answer. "How can they be expected to understand a girl like Amélie? They do not know her. They have not seen her work. They do not recognize in her an artist of original and distinctive gifts; a girl of great force of character, too; who has ways and opinions of her own, and is entitled to have them; and if they misinterpret any little eccentricity, or bit of unconventionality or defiance or anything of that kind, then that is their lookout: she is not likely to heed."

It was a skilful and ingenious defence. But was it the poor mother he was trying to persuade—or himself?

She turned to our Mrs. Threepenny-bit.

"I hear you are going to drive to Balaclava to-day. Would you be so kind as to take Amélie with you? The fact is I got so tired yesterday walking about the Malakoff hill, and dragging myself up to the Redan—"

The pale and sallow face was suffused with consciousness; she knew that we knew why she was making this proposal. And although our miniature major-domo was not unwilling to come to the relief of this alarmed and distressed mother, and to take over for a space the charge of her rebellious child, she had her own precise and definite ideas as to the conditions. There was to be no kind of collusion or connivance with Paul Hitrovo where *she* was concerned.

"Yes, we are off for shore as soon as the steam-launch returns. And we shall be very glad if Amélie will join our party: Mr. Wolfenberg is going with us; and that would just fill the carriage."

She spoke distinctly; and again the poor woman, even in expressing her gratitude, flushed a little. She seemed to divine the disfavor with which this small person had come to regard the Russian. And, perhaps, at the same time she was secretly glad of it: at all events, she appeared to be very much relieved on finding that her daughter, who was bent on revisiting Russian soil, would do so under safe escort.

Miss Dumaresq, also, when she was made aware of this arrangement, was pleased to express her approval and thanks, though there was a touch of coldness in her manner, one fancied. Anyhow, she professed to be very friendly with Wolfenberg as we were going ashore; and if she looked round about before leaving the ship, as if seeking for some one, we had no right to assume that it was Paul Hitrovo she had in her mind. Lady Cameron and the shy Baby were also in the steam-launch; and the former had on this occasion donned a very pretty costume—a blue serge jacket and skirt, the former open in front; a white woollen vest; a smart little silken neck-tie in the tartan of the Clan Cameron; while round her white straw hat there was a narrow band which bore a similar proud message to any one who chanced to know. She was not ashamed to wear the colors of Lochiel. Moreover, the

novelty of this expedition seemed to have excited her somewhat. The wild-rose complexion was freshened up; her clear eyes were full of light, and interest, and animation; she was talkative more than her wont.

"I must find out the precise place at Balaclava where the Highlanders were drawn up in line," she was saying, amongst other matters. "I want to see where they gave that answer to Sir Colin Campbell, when he told them they must be prepared to die where they stood: 'Ay, ay, Sir Colin; an' need be, we'll do that.' I'm very fond of that answer. Yes, and I like the angry remonstrance that Sir Colin called out to the 93rd: 'Ninety-third, ninety-third, damn all that eagerness!' Phrases like that seem to show you things—"

"Peggy," interposed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "you can be a soldier's wife without using soldiers' language—"

"Why, these sayings are classical!" she retorted, not unnaturally. "Only—was it at Balaclava—or the Alma—that Sir Colin had to check the 93rd?—I am not quite certain—" But here we were at the landing-stage, so that these historical investigations had to be dropped.

And here also were the carriages that had been engaged for us—two-horsed open vehicles, the drivers thick-set, long-haired, sun-tanned men, wearing an outer garment not unlike that of a bathing-machine woman, but heavily padded and quilted, with a flat blue cap on their head, and an elaborate silver belt round their capacious waist. We rather wondered at the mass of clothing, here in the broiling sunlight; but no sooner had we driven away from the harbor, and through the town, and up towards the heights behind, than we found there was a keen breeze blowing across those lonely and arid and far-extending plains. And with what a fury went those horses along the rutted roads!—and how we were thrown about and pitched from side to side, clinging on with desperation!—and in what rolling clouds the dense dust rose around us, to be swept away by that cold, cutting wind! We had no idea of our whereabouts, or of what had aforetime happened on these desolate wastes; for our driver stared blankly when addressed in French or German; and, indeed, we were not over-anxious to distract his attention during this wild chariot-race. But it was now that Amélie Dumaresq revealed the real mood in which she had set *out with us*; her feigned and cold complacency

was abandoned; she was openly petulant and angry and discontented.

"This is perfectly absurd," she said, "driving through a country in absolute ignorance! We ought to have had some one with us who knew Russian. Yesterday everything was explained—everything was made clear—because Mr. Hitrovo was with us—and mamma was as interested as any one!"

It was hardly a civil speech. *We* had not sought her society; nor were we bound to crowd the carriage to accommodate her Russian friend.

"Why, Amélie," said Wolfenberg, in his good-natured way, "I thought you were learning Russian—now is your time to practise."

There was no answer. But in truth it presently appeared as though she had some ground for grumbling; for the vehicles ahead of us were now seen to be coming back—a sudden change of route we could not in the least understand. And a prodigious spectacle they presented, too: the furious-galloping horses, the bearded drivers, the carriages visible now and again amid the rolling volumes of dust looked more like a battery of artillery in mad retreat. As they thundered by us, they called out—what we could not hear. We could only turn and follow them, clinging on for dear life to leather or metal as we swayed and bumped and swept along, especially after we had left the main highway and were careering over tracks that were plentifully supplied with lumps of solid rock. The heavily-swathed, long-haired driver paid no attention to these obstacles, paid no attention to the turnings, paid no attention to anything, in fact, except to urge on his horses at full speed, so as to overtake the other carriages. And thus it was that at last we reached the farm-house which was Lord Raglan's head-quarters, and in which he died; we entered and walked through the gaunt and empty rooms, on the doors of which are still the names of certain of the English Generals; then we passed down through the garden, which was most pleasantly bright and green amid the wide wastes of sand; and then we got into the carriage again, and surrendered ourselves to the mercy of those two intemperate beasts, to say nothing of the scorching sunlight, and the cutting wind, and the stifling clouds of dust.

Yes, we ought certainly to have studied strategic maps and plans before leaving the ship, and not to have trusted to obtaining information by the way. For what could the unassisted im-

agination make out of these desert altitudes, with their occasional patch of cultivation, and their flocks of cattle, sheep, and goats wandering about the stony ground or edging down towards the muddy and betrampled watering-places? We needed the divine rage of Ajax to transform these peaceful creatures into solid masses of Russian cavalry. And yet they were about all that we saw as we drove across the sterile plains—on and on—and ever and ever south and east—until we began to descend to the coast-line again; then some trees and a house or two appeared; we swept through the small hamlet of Kadikoi; and at last came in sight of a little land-locked bay of brilliant blue-green water—steep heights surrounding it—a line of cheerful-looking houses along the shore—the picturesque ruins of an ancient fort up against the sky—with, finally, a twisting channel that obviously led to the outer sea. This was Balaclava; but if anybody had declared it to be Boscastle, in Cornwall, we should hardly have been bold enough to contradict him: the resemblance, in situation especially, is remarkable.

Several of our Orotanians had arrived before us; and we could see that Amélie Dumaresq was anxiously, if furtively, scanning those groups as we drove up. But there was no Hitrovo there, nor any sign of him in the one or two carriages that presently followed: it was clear that he had remained on board ship. Now this was really a shameful piece of inattention on his part, after the marked favor she had shown him on the previous evening; for, although it is true she had been confided to our charge, he ought to have joined the general party on the chance of being of service to her at some time or other during the day. Nor did she scruple to exhibit her disappointment and dissatisfaction with everything around her. Wounded pride, one would have thought, might have prompted her to conceal her chagrin; but she was too much of a spoilt child to care for any such considerations; indeed, instead of looking on Paul Hitrovo's absence as an open slight, she appeared to regard it as part and parcel of our defective arrangements for the day.

"Nothing seems to have been provided for—no one seems to know anything," she said, sulkily.

And this again was most unfair; for here were we a swarm of hungry folk descending upon this little out-of-the-world place, and what had we a right to expect? As a matter of fact, we were

exceedingly well treated. Down by the shore, and connected with the land by a little gangway, there was a sort of floating annexe to the hotel; and here, in the open air, in the cool shade of a canopy, and at white-covered tables, a quite sumptuous feast was served. It was a little irregular, it is true; for as the hotel seemed lacking in domestics, certain of our younger Orotanians volunteered to act as waiters; and their method of procedure was to go into the hotel-kitchen and boldly seize on anything they could find, bringing the steaming and uncovered dishes across the intervening promenade. Indeed the rough-and-ready banquet was far too profuse for luncheon; there was nothing to grumble at; on the other hand there was much to interest the curious. And Wolfenberg—well-a-day!—was trying to please this young lady, and to coax her into a better humor, by praising those Russian *plats*. Then he got a bottle of wine, and opened it, and poured out some for her. She hardly tasted it—and pushed the glass coldly away. But, happening to notice that the label on the bottle was printed in Russian characters, she changed her mind, raised the glass again, and took another sip.

"This is no *petit vin bleu*," said she—and we were quite glad to find there was something that met her approval, in this untoward mood of hers.

After luncheon we got a rowing-boat manned by two Greeks, and pulled away across the bay, and under the ruins of the Genoese fort, and along the twisting channel that leads to the open sea. It was curious to think that through this narrow little strait all the vast stores and ammunitions for the great army encamped inland had to pass; this was the only highway of communication with the outer world that the English possessed. Still and peaceful enough it was now; the only signs of human life or occupation we saw were the stake-nets of the sardine-fishers.

The outer sea and the magnificent headlands did not detain us long; for we knew we should be going by the same coast on the resumption of our voyage; soon we were on our way back again; and in due course of time reached the landing-stage at Balaclava, and were ready to continue our route. But at this point something occurred that eventually led to most sad and sorrowful consequences. The carriages we had brought with us were pretty much common property, our good Orotanians, knowing that all were provided for, simply taking any one that was handy, and in

some cases making an exchange of companions, for the sake of variety. Thus it came about that the writer of these lines, perceiving a smart little victoria-looking vehicle, seated for two, suggested to Lady Cameron that she and he might take possession, conveying Miss Emily over to Mrs. Threepenny-bit; and as this arrangement seemed to suit everybody concerned, it was agreed to and acted upon at once; and presently we were all of us upon the road again, driving, as was understood, to the battle-field of Balaclava.

"This is very excellent," contentedly observed the young lady who was wearing the Clan Cameron colors.

"I think so."

"Oh, mind you, I understand. I am not flattered," continued Peggy, making herself comfortable in her corner. "Every one can see that Miss Dumaresq is in a frightful temper—I suppose because her Russian has not shown up; and so, having had enough of her little ways all the morning, you take the first chance of escape."

"There may be something in that too."

"I say: have you considered this?" she went on—and for a few seconds she spoke rather more seriously. "If that young man should prove indifferent, after she has so openly flung the handkerchief to him, do you know what she will do? She will kill him."

"But why should he prove indifferent? She is extremely pretty; she can be most fascinating when she pleases; she has admirable accomplishments—if her painting is to be brought down to that level; and she is wealthy. What more?"

"Why did he not come over here to-day?"

"Well, there might be some excuse for a Russian not caring to visit Balaclava."

Peggy was silent and thoughtful for a little while.

"A woman scorned," she said, presently, "is a dangerous kind of creature, wherever and whoever she is; but when she is such a woman as Amélie Dumaresq, with her proud and passionate nature—well, if I were a friend of M. Paul Hitrovo, I would warn him not to play tricks with fire and lightning."

At this moment, as we were passing through a village, our driver saw fit to draw up in order to water his horses; and as he alone did so, the other carriages continued on their way and very soon disappeared. The village was the little hamlet of Kadikoi

or Kadikovka, in front of which Sir Colin Campbell, previous to the battle of Balaclava, had posted the 93rd Highlanders; and, by rights our conversation should have been about military matters. But it wasn't. It was about all kinds of things, that need not be set down here; for the man was a long time in tending his beasts; and we were in no hurry. When again we set out we had the whole wide world before us; the others had long ago vanished out of sight.

And so we drove on, and drove on, very well content. The landscape did not much concern us; and, after the warning she had uttered about Paul Hitrovo, Peggy did not care to return to that dark and problematical subject. We drove on and drove on; the world forgetting, by the world forgot. Some mountains appeared in the north; but we did not know their name; and did not care. It was not until we had got up into the higher plains, commanding an extensive view, that one thought of looking out for the other carriages: there was not a trace of them anywhere in all that wide and lonely landscape. And then the awful thought occurred that our driver had missed his way or mistaken his orders; while there was no means of communicating with him, as he spoke nothing but his own tongue. The suspicion in course of time became a certainty. We were now well on our way towards Sebastopol, and were being carried thither against our will, without having had even a glimpse of the battle-field of Balaclava, or the Causeway Heights, or the Valley of Death! This was a pretty position for the wife of Colonel Cameron of Inverfask: to have been in the immediate neighborhood of the valley where the Light Brigade delivered their famous charge, and not to have even looked at it. Moreover, we were going away in the morning; the blunder was irretrievable; while questions, and appeals, and remonstrances were all thrown away on our puzzled and patient coachman. Peggy was distracted; it was not of her husband she was thinking; it was the base imaginings and sarcasm of a certain small fiend of a woman that she feared.

"What will she say now!" she exclaimed—her eyes full of laughter and confusion, her face flushed a rose-red. "She will declare we took the wrong road on purpose!"

"Lofty souls, conscious of their own rectitude, can afford to despise the insinuations of the vulgar throng. But I wish I knew where the mischief this man is carrying us."

For apparently our good friend on the box, in answer to our prayers, had altered his route; but we were getting nowhither—not even to Sebastopol! On and on we drove, over those illimitable sandy plains, the only living creatures visible being a large number of hawks that kept hovering high in air and swooping down from time to time. The desert, furthermore, seemed to be everywhere strewn, and thickly strewn, with small white flowers; but these we subsequently found to be tiny snails in narrow and spiral white shells. For the rest, scant brushwood, long, yellow roads, here and there the voiceless solitudes rising into a rounded hill: this was the land we found ourselves in.

"Well," said Peggy at last, "there is no chance now of discovering where those people have gone: we must be miles and miles away from the battle-field of Balaclava. And we shall have to bear jeers and contumely as best we may. But there is one thing I must insist on: I cannot go back to England without having paid a visit to the English Cemetery. Good gracious! what would Ewen think—what would all our soldier-friends think—if I confessed that I was in the Crimea, and had landed at Sebastopol, and yet didn't go to see if the English tombstones were being looked after? They would think I was demented! Now, where is the English Cemetery? This man must know; can't you get him to tell you? Try him! There must be some kind of language he can understand."

It was a maddening situation.

"Hier, Schwager!—Kutscher!—Isvoshick!—Yamschik!—sagen Sie 'mal—in Gottes Namen!—wo ist der englische Kirchhof—der Gottesacker—man alive, the English Cemetery!—the Cemetery—Cathcart's Hill—le cimetière—le cimetière anglais—il cimiterio—"

The patient, clear, questioning eyes remained blank and vague. But there was still another kind of language. One had perforce to get down from the carriage, and with a walking-stick go through an elaborate pantomime of digging a grave. Then he seemed to comprehend. He pointed to a distant height, where there appeared to be a kind of wall, with some little touch of verdure surmounting it here and there. We eagerly assented. And again we were rolling along those arid plains, and down into a deep valley, and up a steep incline, until we stood in front of a small building forming part of a large, oblong, and walled enclos-

ure; and here our troubles were at an end; for the stalwart person who appeared at the door, and who fortunately spoke French, told us we had found what we were in search of, explained that he was the custodian, and invited us to pass through the corridor to the Cemetery behind.

"After all," said Peggy, under her breath, "I shall not be entirely disgraced when I go back to England." Indeed she seemed very much relieved, as we stepped down into those little alleys that ran between the clustered shrubs and the many memorial stones.

On the whole, we found the place fairly well looked after, though naturally, after these long years, a number of the tombstones and monuments show signs of decay. We wandered about for some time, recognizing here and there a well-known name, and struck rather by the remoteness and solitariness of this enclosure than by any sadder associations. In truth, the general aspect of the English Cemetery is one of quiet and peaceful cheerfulness; to the eye it looks pleasantly green after you have driven over those sterile brown plains. Then we returned to the carriage and blindly surrendered ourselves to fate and the Russian driver. We had not the least idea whither he was now taking us. Nothing visible anywhere but long undulations, intersecting roads, withered herbage, and a universal powdering of white shells: were we to find these around us forever and evermore? But of a sudden the world opened before us, and we looked down into it — looked down and beheld a shining white town and a blue bay; beyond these the wider inlet, the shores of Sivernaia, and the outstanding mass of Fort Konstantine; and high above all these again the open sea and the far horizon-line. And right in the centre of this spacious picture was our beloved *Orotania*— looking small because of the distance, but welcome as the sight of home.

When we arrived on board, we found Mrs. Threepenny-bit awaiting us at the gangway—amazement in her eyes, and in the rapid questions she addressed to Peggy. What had become of us? Why did not the man follow the other carriages? Why was he not remonstrated with? And so forth. But, at all events, she had no present opportunity of sharpening her sarcasms; for most of the women-folk had resolved upon dressing before dinner, it being understood that in all probability our Russian guests would

arrive early. The consequence was, that when our Orotanians, in obedience to the steward's bell, assembled in the saloon and took their places at table, they presented quite a gay appearance—the women in their smartest costumes, the men in evening dress; jewels flashed and sparkled; there was quite an unusual stir and animation. In the matter of diamonds, indeed, Amélie Dumaresq outshone all the others in splendor: she had a comb of diamonds and stars of diamonds in her raven-black hair, a necklace of diamonds round her neck, a buckle of diamonds at her belt, and a profusion of diamond rings on her fingers. 'Far too much display for a young unmarried woman' was no doubt the inward pronouncement of our diminutive but ruthless Censor-in-chief: on the other hand, it was well known that the Russian ladies who were coming were given to similar ostentation, and why should their English or American sisters be eclipsed? Lady Cameron had brought hardly any of such adornments with her; and the poor Baby, *simplex munditiis*, had none at all; so that at our table the only gorgeous creature was the Spanish-looking young lady, whose liquid dark eyes laughed, and whose red lips showed a gleam of pearly teeth, as she chatted away in the highest spirits. For she had entirely banished her untoward temper of the morning. Perhaps she had had from Hitrovo some explanation of his absence? At all events, she was now full of a vivacious and communicative gayety, so that even her mother forgot her anxiety for the moment, and looked pleased and proud. And Wolfenberg? —he seemed pleased and proud too. He regarded her admiringly—perhaps conscious all the same of the little touch of make-up that accentuated the black and high-arched eyebrows, and heightened the cherry-red of her smiling lips. And if he would rather have had her command attention and admiration in far other spheres and by far other means, well, that was a question for severer moments: why should she not, on such an exceptional evening as this, elate her heart with social triumphs, and, in mere matters of appearance and style and effect, carry off the honors of this improvised ball?

The scene on deck was exceedingly pretty. The whole of the after-part of the ship had been covered in by canvas as a protection from the wind; and this impromptu ballroom was lit up by red and yellow swinging lamps, while there was an additional glow from the raised skylights. Soon our guests began to arrive—

boat after boat coming across the smooth, moonlit water; there was a clanking of scabbards on the accommodation-ladder; there was a grouping of white figures around the gangway. And presently a fine commotion prevailed on board; for our visitors had no thought of attending there and then to the strains of the band; they wanted to inspect this strange ship that had wandered into these unfamiliar waters, and, besides, the ladies had to leave their wraps and coverings below. There was everywhere an eager curiosity and astonishment, expressed mostly in French; not content with examining the saloon, they wandered hither and thither; you encountered fairy visions in the dark corridors leading to the lower deck; the occupants of the smoking-room—the old fogies who did not wish to be disturbed by these frivolities—were startled by the apparition of a whole bevy of creatures in silk and muslin and satin, all with fans, some with bouquets, here and there one staring through a *pince-nez*. And when the dancing did begin it proved to be animated enough. In particular our visitors entertained us with a peculiar dance—some kind of Russian mazurka—which was remarkably picturesque; the chief feature being that the gentleman (in this case an officer), before leading two ladies, one on each hand, down the whole length of the deck to turn them over to the opposite cavalier, made a little preliminary spring into the air, and clapped his spurs together. It was rather like the action of a game-cock; and one or two of our young men tried it; but leather does not make so effective a snap as steel. For the rest, the Russian ladies, with much laughter and good-humor, put their English partners through the features of the dance, and all went off very well.

Meanwhile, what of our small section of this assemblage? Well, we were mostly spectators; yet not uninterested spectators. What chiefly struck us was the open and unconcealed fashion in which Amélie Dumaresq devoted herself to her Russian friend. He seemed to own her. If there had been any quarrel between them about his un-lover-like inattention of the morning, they had certainly made it up. It was waltzes they chiefly danced, and she engaged herself to no one else; when she was not dancing, they sate out, or she brought him along to talk to her mother; then, by-and-by, the low-breathing, seductive music would begin again, Hitrovo would claim her, and away they would go, her head bent a little down, her hand on his shoulder, gliding with swift and

noiseless steps through the mysterious semi-twilight. Wolfenberg was standing with us, and looking on, in an absent kind of way. It is a pretty kind of thing, the waltzing of two lovers together, lost in the consciousness of their own happiness, lost in the consciousness of their possession of each other. But sometimes, elsewhere, it stabs deep.

As for Mrs. Dumaresq, she would probably have been still further distressed by this too pronounced self-surrender on the part of her daughter, only that she had developed a new anxiety: it was about Amélie's diamonds that she was now concerned.

"She is so headstrong and careless," she said, in an undertone, to Mrs. Threepenny-bit. Then she continued, with a fond mother's pride: "There is no one here to-night who has anything like Amélie's diamonds—except, perhaps, that Russian girl who is going to be married, and these are really her wedding presents that she is showing off. And Amélie could have outdone her if she had known. Oh, yes, she could. What she is wearing isn't half what she has got with her, on this very ship; it is a fancy of hers to take them with her wherever she goes; and there is no reasoning with her about the danger of it."

"She seems to be enjoying herself very much."

"Yes," said the white-haired dame, with a bit of a sigh. "For the moment. And of course I am glad—glad to see her happy. But—but I don't know how it will all turn out: she won't tell me anything."

If she would not tell, other people could surmise. When—withdrawing from the music and the soft winnowing of dresses on deck and from the busy merriment of the supper-tables in the saloon—two of our Orotanians, a tall young lady and her smaller and more elderly friend, were bidding each other an affectionate good-night outside the door of their cabins, the one of them said, almost in a whisper—

"Peggy, I tell you I am convinced. Mrs. Dumaresq only suspects. But I am as sure as sure can be that there is at last some understanding, if not an actual engagement, between those two. And what is more, Wolfenberg has also guessed it."

"Have you spoken to him?" Peggy asked quickly.

"How could I!" said the smaller woman. "I dared not! But I know that he has guessed: I saw it in his face—when he was looking on at the *dancing*."

## CHAPTER XV

### A SIGNATURE

And yet, while this dark problem of life and fate was being worked out under our very eyes, it was an excellent thing that we could turn aside from time to time and forget it, and be well content with Peggy's cheerfulness, and good-humored ways, and happy enjoyment of the passing hour. She was not a person of mature years, it is true; but she had a sharp observation and a good memory; and she had seen something of the world and of human nature. The worst of it was that you could never tell whether she was truthfully relating her own experiences, or whether she was, out of pure devilment, romancing—in other words, manufacturing l**s. Who could believe, for example, that she ever saw, in the streets of Boston, Mass., U. S. A., a man stop at a shop-window and seriously proceed to set his watch by an aneroid barometer?

"You are so horribly incredulous," she exclaimed, as she was briskly walking up and down the quarter-deck before breakfast, with an occasional glance towards the white barracks and the domed churches of Sebastopol. "I suppose, now, if I were to tell you of the man—"

"What, another one?"

"Do not interrupt," she observes, placidly. "This man was also absent-minded; for, being driven distracted by the irregularities of the various clocks in his native town, he sat down and wrote a letter to Greenwich Observatory, begging the people there for goodness' sake to write back and let him have the exact time. So I have been informed, at least. But I suppose you wouldn't believe that either?"

"When you lie awake in the morning, you seem to think of a good many queer people."

"Oh, that's nothing to what I could tell you," she remarks, with cheerful composure. "But it's little use talking to you: you *are so* suspicious. I dare say, now, you wouldn't believe me if I

"The Russian steppes have always been famous," murmured Peggy, under her breath.

"And don't you think it was most considerate of our third officer to take the silver coin that was offered him?" she proceeded. "Oh, didn't you hear? Well, he was at the top of the accommodation-ladder, looking after the people getting away in the boats; and I dare say the lamp did not show his uniform very clearly; and when the Russian officer, on leaving, handed him a franc, or the equivalent of a franc, I think Mr. —— showed great good sense and good taste in taking it and saying nothing about it. It was a harmless mistake—and—and perhaps the Russian officer did not notice Mr. ——'s uniform; and, surely, it was better to be considerate, and not to offend any one by a refusal—when they were our guests?"

Then, as she was chiefly addressing her women-friends, her talk drifted on to dresses and diamonds; and nothing would do the young lady but that she must go away and fetch her own jewels, for the inspection of the curious. She was absent only a few moments; when she returned she brought with her a rosewood casket mounted in silver, and, sitting down, proceeded to take out tray after tray. Certainly the encrusted masses of diamonds she now produced more than confirmed what her mother had confided to our Mrs. Threepenny-bit on the previous evening; here indeed was a shining and superb display, even in cold daylight; her companions, eagerly interested, looked on as she revealed—with a little affectation of indifference, perhaps—these successive treasures.

"No, I am not satisfied with them," she said—her eyebrows carelessly raising themselves. "There are plenty of them; and most of the stones are of good quality; but the different pieces are too scattered, too dissimilar. I must have some more comprehensive design. Some day or other I will have them taken to a first-class jeweller in Paris or Vienna, and get him to draw out sketches for a general and uniform re-setting: don't you think that would be advisable?" Then she fitted in the trays again, and carried away the valuable box to her cabin.

Now when women show their jewellery to each other, it is a confidential kind of thing; it implies intimacy; it is as if they were talking over secrets. And so, when Miss Dumaresq returned on deck, she came back to this little circle, and resumed these friend-

ly and familiar relations. It was quite clear that she was determined to captivate everybody; and undoubtedly she could make herself most fascinating when she chose; there was a musical quality in her laugh that it was difficult to resist. Even her mother came in for a share of her blandishments; and we could see that the poor woman, though affecting to repel all this coaxing and flattery, was immensely pleased none the less. And Wolfenberg?

"Ernest," said the young lady (as if by way of complaining), "why is it you are able to look at the beautiful side of things, and forget that anything else exists? For example, when you see a ship in full sail—in sunlight—on a blue sea—and surely there are few things more beautiful than that—well, that is all you look at, that is all you think of; whereas other people have to go further—they know that inside that beautiful appearance there is a hideous mass of ugliness and meanness—foul language, rum-drinking, tobacco-chewing, anger, jealousy, greed of wages, everything mercenary and vile. You go through life with a series of exquisite visions always around you; you live in a succession of fairy palaces. It isn't fair. Why should you have such a faculty? Why should you enjoy such immunity?"

"Immunity from what?" said he, in his tolerant way. For he never argued with her: he only offered suggestions — timidly watching her eyes the while for consent. "I'm afraid, Amélie, I cannot live in a fairy palace any more than any one else. To do that you would have to be a ghost. So long as you are a human being, you have to take the very substantial knocks and buffets that human life administers—and make the best of it."

"My dear Lady Cameron," she went on, turning to her next victim, "what a charming picture that will be of your sister when Mr. Wolfenberg has thought out some idea for it! It is precisely the face that will lend itself to his imagination—calm, mysterious, and thoughtful. And what beautiful eyes she has—and a dignity and repose of expression, too: singular in one so young. Mr. Verrinder is a fortunate young man to be able to give such a commission, and to find an artist able to undertake it.

Peggy looked startled, as well she might, for this was the first she had heard of the projected sketch; while for a second a shade of annoyance over this premature disclosure passed across Wolfenberg's grave and pensive face. But Miss Dumaresq took no

heed: she was off and away again in her airy endeavors to captivate the hearts of our small set; but more especially, as it seemed to us, was she determined to win over the stern and uncompromising miniature despot who holds us in her iron rule.

Soon we were to discover the meaning of it all. For some little time after leaving Sebastopol, the lonely and desolate shores of the Chersonese are flat and uninteresting, and we had hardly looked at them; but when you have passed the Cape and Monastery of St. Georgia, they gain in height and dignity; and again, when you have gone by the narrow strait leading into Balaclava harbor, the Crimean coast rises into a series of precipitous cliffs that are lofty and picturesque enough, with their bare and splintered summits and their lower slopes powdered green with trees. Cold in color was this coast, even while the sun shone along the ruddy-grey crags; and cold in color was the sea, because of certain thin and wandering clouds; but, nevertheless, Miss Dumaresq must needs begin to talk of the beauty of the Russian Riviera which we were now approaching, and of its magnificent mountains, its perfect climate, and its princely estates and residences.

"So I have heard," said she; "for, of course, I have never been here myself. "But don't you think," she continued, addressing herself insidiously to Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "that we ought to have the assistance of Mr. Hitrovo? As we sail along, he could tell us the names of the people who own the palaces. I have been looking at a rather antiquated map, and I see Prince Woronzov, and General Narishkin, and Count Potocki, and the Prince of Ligne, and a great number of others; only we ought to know if the same people are there now. And Mr. Hitrovo should be able to tell us, naturally; and I am sure he would be so glad if he could be any service. May I go and fetch him?"

So this was the origin and object of all her skilful flattery and fascination—to procure for him a friendly reception in that little corner of the quarter-deck usually occupied by our small circle? Well, we could not easily decline, whether we were interested in Prince Galitzin and Count Potocki or whether we were not. And to tell the truth, when the young Russian did come along, he seemed to be conscious of the humor of the situation; for, as a matter of fact, he, never having been in this part of the world before, had literally nothing to tell us; while Amélie Dumaresq, anxious to retain him, and anxious also that he should produce a

favorable impression, kept plying him with questions, which he vaguely answered with a certain smiling indifference. It was Mrs. Threepenny-bit whom mostly she strove to get interested in the young man; and her ingenious and subtle endeavors to do so were almost pathetic to witness. But Mrs. Threepenny-bit, as some of us have discovered, is a person whom it is rather difficult to cajole.

"He seems to think," she had said on more than one occasion, "that he has only to look at you with his wonderful eyes, and that that is enough. And I suppose it is enough—for a girl; but for older people—no. M. Paul Hitrovo is altogether too lazy, too nonchalant, too well satisfied with himself. But as for his good looks, there's no denying them; and perhaps it is chiefly as an artist that Amélie Dumaresq worships such a beautiful young man; for, in truth, he does not appear to take much trouble about paying court to her."

However, the present circumstances were quite exceptional. The small woman had but recently arrived at the conviction that there was some kind of understanding, if not an actual engagement, between these two; and did not this transparent stratagem on the part of the young lady afford some confirmation? Accordingly, she talked to Paul Hitrovo, studying him the while; and Amélie stood by, listening intently, and putting in clever little suggestions here and there to help him. Wolfenberg, some way apart, did not join in the conversation; he was regarding those two younger people, and seemed plunged in a profound reverie. Miss Dumaresq did not chance to look in his direction; she was altogether engrossed in having this deck-alliance cemented. Might not the young Russian hereafter be assumed to have become "one of us"? Peggy, like Wolfenberg, was silent; she did not approve of the intrusion of strangers.

But Peggy was not silent when, a short time thereafter, she found an opportunity of separating herself from this little group. Another member of the charmed circle got up and followed her —followed her across to the rail, on which she leant with both arms folded, pretending to examine the features of the mountainous coast we were passing.

"Tell me," she said, in an undertone and yet rapidly, "what did Miss Dumaresq mean by talking of a portrait of Emily? Is Mr. Wolfenberg going to paint her portrait? And what has Mr.

Verrinder to do with it? Really, I think I ought to have been consulted in this matter. What is it all about?"

"It isn't exactly a portrait," one tries to explain to her; "and there has hardly been anything done with it yet, until Wolfenberg finds a subject. It is a sketch, on the deck of the ship, and your sister has kindly consented to act as model."

"But what has Mr. Verrinder to do with it?" she demands. "Why should his name be introduced?"

"Well, the sketch is a commission. Don't you think a young man of property is very much to be commended who spends his money in buying pictures? It is not a common form of extravagance nowadays."

"I know this," she says, with a certain severity, "that Mr. Verrinder is going about a great deal too much with Emily. And it isn't fair on his part. I won't have it. What does she know about such things? She is too amiable to repel his attentions, even if she understood them; but she doesn't understand them; she is too young; she is a mere child."

"Children of eighteen, especially when they are of the female kind, sometimes understand more than you might imagine."

"But Emily!" she says. "Who could associate her with secret interviews and stolen glances?"

"Or missing the battle-field of Balaclava?"

"It's all very well," she goes on, unheeding, "but I will not have the Baby's innocence imposed upon. Years and years hence she may begin to think of such things; and even then I don't believe she will; she is much too serious-minded to encourage any young man. If you had studied her character as thoroughly as I have, you would know how entirely different she is from other girls of her age; and no one would be more shocked and indignant than herself at the idea that she was likely to fall into any such entanglement. And so Mr. Verrinder will have to learn to efface himself a little, and retire into the background."

She would probably have continued this subject, about which it was clear her mind was considerably concerned, but that those other people now left their places, and also came over to the rail. For we were approaching that part of the coast, from Alúpka onwards, where the Russian nobility have their seaside residences; and some of these looked very imposing, amid hanging gardens and abundant foliage, with the vast limestone cliffs towering be-

hind. Amélie Dumaresq, no longer doubtful of the success of her scheme, was in the very gayest of spirits, chattering to everybody at once, and making cruel sport of Hitrovo's indifference and his ignorance of his native land.

"Why, you knew you were coming to the Crimea, did you not?" she went on to say.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," he answered her. "I had no special wish, however."

"You simply came on board, and let them take you wherever they pleased?" said she.

"That is about it," he responded, inattentively, looking towards the shore.

"Well, you are the most extraordinary person!" she exclaimed, with a familiarity of tone and address of which she was herself perhaps unconscious. "Will you allow me to inform you that over there, amongst those trees, is the palace of your emperor?"

"Oh, really!" he said, without much concern. "That is Livadia, then?"

"And you not to know!" she cried, with her merry black eyes laughing at him. "At all events, when we get into Yalta, you must come ashore with us and show us that at least you can speak a little of your own language." She turned to Mrs. Threepennybit, and said to her, with a pretty expression of innocence—"I had always understood that French would serve you everywhere in Russia; but it didn't do so in Sebastopol, did it? However, it will be all right if Mr. Hitrovo goes ashore with us at Yalta, won't it?—and it will be so much more convenient if we make one party: don't you think so?"

The smaller woman did not answer. She had been trapped and tricked into this arrangement, she hardly knew how. But there still remained to her the alternative of politely declining to go ashore at all.

Yalta now lay right ahead of us; we were slowly steaming into the spacious bay. And if the cold color of the Russian Riviera had somewhat disappointed us, we had at least to confess that the situation and aspect of this remote little watering-place were very beautiful indeed. The background a range of mighty mountains, grey and ruddy grey in their sterile altitudes, but darker where the far-extending forests hung along their precipitous slopes; at

their base a series of lower hills smothered in deep green vegetation; here and there, among the vines, and figs, and cypress, a red-tiled Swiss-looking châlet, with projecting roofs and verandas; perched on one of these wooded heights, a pretty little white-domed church, with its gold crosses glittering in the sun; then down by the beach a long and straggling settlement of houses and bathing establishments, many of the former surrounded with gardens. Altogether a fresh, bright, cheerful-looking place, snugly nestled under that gigantic mountainous rampart, and rejoicing in a luxuriance of verdure that was doubly welcome to the eye after the arid wastes and plains of the Chersonese.

But as for going ashore? Hardly had the sullen thunder of the anchor-chain echoed through the silence of this open bay when Amélie Dumaresq, all eagerness and joyousness, came hurrying along, bringing with her her mother and also her captured Russian; and it was clear she meant to carry us off with her in the very first boat. But Mrs. Threepenny-bit hung back a little. She glanced towards Wolfenberg.

"Do you think it is worth while," she said to him, "so late in the afternoon? We shall have the whole of to-morrow to wander about. And a place like this always looks best from the ship: you spoil it by landing." She turned to the young lady. "No, thank you; I think we will wait till to-morrow."

"You are the laziest people!" Miss Dumaresq cried, laughing. "Come along, Mimsey!" And therewith she got her mother safely down the accommodation-ladder and into the boat; and presently they were on their way to the distant landing-place, across the slow-heaving and pellucid green water.

Mrs. Threepenny-bit again turned to Wolfenberg—he had been leaning on the rail, absently watching the embarkation.

"It is a wonderful thing to have youth," he said, "and a quick and warm pulse, and a vivid and eager enjoyment of even the veriest trifles. But in her case it may deceive you. She has the faculty of being so entirely absorbed in what is immediately around her, her wayward moods and impulses are so real to her at the time, that you might think she had abandoned other and far more important ideas or interests which, as a matter of fact, she has not abandoned at all."

"'Oats-*pease*-*beans*,' for example?" she said, with a smile.

"Miss Dumaresq was extraordinarily enthusiastic about that subject—for the space of half-an-hour or so!"

"I should not at all be surprised," said he, gravely, "if she were suddenly to take that up, when there was a proper opportunity, of course, and so concentrate herself upon it that she would put aside this voyage and all its circumstances as a matter hardly even to be remembered. Her mind is curiously tenacious of certain things: you never can tell when she may dismiss her present interests as insignificant, and revert to deeply-cherished purposes and ambitions. At any instant she might brush aside these temporary pre-occupations and show you her true self."

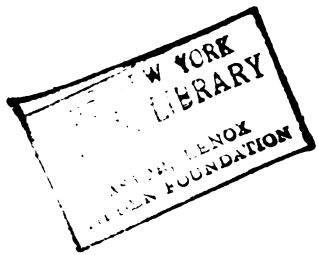
Was he still, then (the small woman might have asked herself), fondly hoping for a resumption of his old relationship with Amélie in spite of all that had happened during these last two or three days? But at this moment an apparently trivial incident occurred that entirely changed the current of her speculations. We were idly walking up and down the after-part of the deck, past the now vacated chairs. On one of these, which had "A. D." stamped on the back, a paper-covered volume had been left; and Wolfenberg, pausing for a second, took it up in his hands. The title outside was "Mémoires du Général Baron de Marbot. I. Gênes—Austerlitz—Eylau."

"An odd kind of book for a young lady to be reading," Mrs. Threepenny-bit observed.

"She is masculine in her literary tastes," he said, simply. "And I hear from her that the author describes certain episodes in his military career with extraordinary force and vividness; and also that he does not scruple about revealing the hideous horrors and sufferings of a campaign. That is no doubt what recommended the book to Amélie—she likes the downright truth—"

He was thoughtlessly turning over the pages. But of a sudden he stopped—stared blankly for a second—then abruptly he closed the volume again and put it down as though he had found some poisonous thing there. His lips had quickly grown colorless; he seemed bewildered; for an instant or two he appeared hardly to know where he was. This emotion, which was only too evident, his immediate companion affected not to perceive; without attempting to disturb or distract him by talking she merely resumed that negligent stroll up and down which had been thus

*"AN ODD KIND OF A BOOK FOR A YOUNG LADY TO BE READING,"*
MRS. THREEPENNY-BIT SAID.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casually interrupted. We were to hear more of this occurrence later on.

As the dusk fell, the people came back to the ship; while ashore, the lofty mountains were gradually deepening in gloom; and in the town small dots of yellow fire had already become visible. Out to sea, on the other hand, masses of louring purple cloud had gathered along the southern horizon; and from time to time there flashed across them quivering glares of lightning. We began to wonder what we should do in this open roadstead, that has no sort of protection whatever from the south, if a gale were to spring up in the night. Already there was a slow, heavy, oily swell coming in that might have been taken to presage a storm. How about our holding-ground? Or should we have to get up steam, and clear out, and face whatever might be approaching?

But all these vague and unprofessional alarms eventually resolved themselves. With the dark came peace, and silence, and the calm of moonlight. By slow degrees the scene before us assumed a strangely fantastic and unreal appearance; for while the vast spaces of forest that covered the slopes of the mountains were obscure and undecipherable, far above these the precipitous limestone peaks and crags, rising into the serene heavens, shone a spectral grey. The little white town, too, with its innumerable points of golden fire, seemed to come out of that mysterious background of sombre foliage; it looked as though it hung in air, over the black and unseen sea. Nevertheless the silence was not absolute: across the intervening space of water we could hear some faint sound of music—so faint, indeed, as at times to be almost inaudible.

We had sought out our accustomed nook along by the wheel-box; and on this evening it chanced (for a while at least) that we three were alone.

"Peggy," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, almost whispering, "I have something so singular to tell you. Did you notice, when we were walking up and down this afternoon, that Mr. Wolfenberg stopped at Amélie Dumaresq's chair, and took up a book she had left behind her?"

"I saw you looking at a book, certainly," Peggy responded, "but I paid no particular attention."

"And neither *did I at the* moment. But all of a sudden, as

Wolfenberg was carelessly turning over the leaves, and talking of Amélie's love of literalness and vividness, he came to a sheet of note-paper that had most likely been used as a mark; and then something very strange appeared in his face, and he hastily put the book down again. Whatever it was, he was much moved; I could see that; but, of course, I did not speak; and he said nothing."

The small woman hesitated, and seemed a little embarrassed.

"Yes, I will confess," she said, in the same low voice, "I was curious—more than curious; I was anxious; my sympathies are so entirely with him—I am so sorry for him in his solitary position—that I could not but want to know what now had happened to him. You see, only a moment or two before he had been speaking of Amélie, and he appeared to think there was still a chance of her all at once throwing aside these present entanglements, and going back to the old relationship that used to exist between him and her—the relationship she was so proud of when she first explained it to me. And this thing—whatever it was—seemed to startle him out of these dreams, for there was never a word more about them: you would have fancied he had received some sudden blow. Well, as soon as I was left alone, and saw my chance, I went round to Miss Dumaresq's chair and took up the book. I had no right to look, of course—but—but I did. And almost directly I discovered what had affected him so deeply. The sheet of note-paper may or may not have been a mark for her place in reading; but, at all events, she had been amusing herself by scribbling things on it; and there, as you could see at a glance, was Paul Hitrovo's name treated in different ways. But that was not all. She had gone on—with such musings in her brain as it is easy to guess at—to write, in a smaller hand, the words '*Amélie d'Hitrovo*'—obviously an experiment to see how the signature would look—"

"But what madness to leave such a thing lying about on deck!" Peggy exclaimed.

"She must have been interrupted, have quickly shut up the volume, and then have forgotten all about it," the smaller woman said. "And these pencilled words were what Wolfenberg must have seen. That was the answer to his vague forecasts, his last despairing hopes about what the future might even yet have in *store for* him."

"Surely it is better he should know the worst at once," her companion said.

"Peggy, there is no 'better' in such a case," the other responded, sadly enough. "There can be nothing but tragic misery—for him, at least; what else can there be?"

Peggy hesitated.

"Something quite unexpected, perhaps—she is so wilful and headstrong—with a character so impetuous as hers is, it is impossible to say what might not happen—"

But here she found her arm furtively grasped by her friend, as a warning. It was Wolfenberg himself who was approaching them.

"Why do you sit in the dark?" he said, in his grave, and placid, and kindly fashion. "Why do you not come and look at the moonlight and the hills? I little imagined that it was the shores of southern Russia that were going to give us a glimpse of the celestial mysteries."

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## CHAPTER XVI

### "HOME, DEARIE, HOME!"

THE morning sun shone on the vivid green water, on the little white town, and on the abundant gardens and vineyards; and the air, cooled by the neighborhood of the great encircling mountains, was pleasant and soft and sweet, when Peggy appeared at the top of the companion, herself fresher and fairer and more smiling than the dawn.

"Where is the Major?" she demanded, blithely enough. "I saw him a few minutes ago, and he said he would fetch some sago or rice, or something of that kind for the ring-dove. Well, never mind; let's go and see if that wicked little hawk is any tamer yet."

For it must be explained that during the voyage the sailors had managed to capture several birds—tired creatures that had taken refuge in the rigging; and these had been confined in rudely-constructed cages, to be taken home to England as pets.

Moreover, as the big wicker-work crate in which Phaon was ignominiously shut up each night stood in a corner just aft of the butcher's den, there was here a convenient space for the stowage of these cages; so that our Orotanians had a kind of small aviary on board; and could when they chose amuse themselves by carrying food or drink to the feathered prisoners. On this occasion, however, the fact that Sappho's pet and the caged birds were in close proximity was destined to lead to lamentable results; for when the Major came along with a paper bag of grain in his hand, Phaon, recognizing his deadly foe, began to growl and snarl.

"Oh, be quiet, you brute!" said the Major, and he aimed a kick at the crate.

This only provoked the irate little animal within to fiercer barking. The Major pretended to take no notice. He handed the bag to Lady Cameron, who proceeded to shake out the grain into the cages. Then the Major, being unoccupied, turned his attention to the yelping cur.

"Will you be quiet, you little beast!" he muttered, angrily, and another kick shook the frail crate.

Alas! it shook it all too effectually. The catch sprang or fell out; the door came ajar; the next instant the furious Phaon had bounded forth and gripped his enemy by the foot of the trousers, worrying and tearing and hauling. At the same moment the Major, trying to kick him off, staggered back, and subsided on to the bench behind; the fabric of slight summer garment at once gave way; but Phaon, not satisfied with this amount of damage, renewed his attack, and seemed bent on getting hold of something more substantial than a bit of cloth. How the onslaught might otherwise have ended it is impossible to determine; what happened was that one of the quartermasters, chancing to come by with a long iron rod in his hand, promptly applied that instrument to an inferior part of Phaon's person; a sudden howl, and a swift and growling retreat into the empty crate immediately followed; while the Major got on to his feet again, his face purple with passion, rage almost depriving him of the power of utterance.

"Here," said he to the quartermaster, in gasping tones, "g—give me that thing! I will prod the little devil's eyes out!"

"Oh, for shame!" said Lady Cameron, interposing, and sending the man away. "Why, you irritated the poor beast!" she said to the Major. "What could you expect?"

Now the Major had been neither frightened nor hurt, but he was simply insensate with rage at having been made ridiculous in the eyes of this young lady.

"What could I expect?" he repeated, with a terrible effort at self-control that boded but ill for Phaon's future happiness. "Oh, perhaps so. Perhaps so. Very—very likely. But I have a long-standing account to settle with that disgusting little animal. Perhaps I provoked him. He has provoked me once or twice. We will see who has the final word."

"Now, Major, what do you mean?" said Peggy, seriously, and with hardly a glimmer of laughter in her eyes. "You would not harbor thoughts of revenge? It was a fair fight—until the quartermaster came in with an attack from the rear. You're not going to bear ill-will?"

"Ill-will? Oh, no," said he, darkly and gloomily. "What is the use of ill-will? But—but I mean to have it out with that infernal little beast. A public nuisance!—a nuisance to the whole ship! But—but I will have some small kind of settling before long—*I think.* And in the meantime I suppose I shall have to go and get a change of clothes." And therewith he departed; and that was all we heard of this encounter—for the time being.

Now although we had many leagues of voyaging still before us, and many (to us) strange and unfamiliar places to visit, this remote little Russian town was the most easterly point of our travels; leaving Yalta, in short, we were leaving for home; and it was but natural that the least curious or enterprising among us should wish to go ashore for a brief space, and look round, and say good-bye. But while we were considering this matter, Amélie Dumaresq came up, and put her hand within Wolfenberg's arm in the most affectionate way, and said to him, reproachfully,

"Ernest, why are you always ready to go ashore with anybody except me? It is not like you to forsake old friends. And I've just told mother I will not leave the ship at all this morning unless you come with us; and when I say 'come with us,' I mean with me—with *me*—you and I together—companions just

as we have been many and many a time, through a good many years."

This was an extraordinary outburst, however obscure its origin. Wolfenberg's grave face flushed somewhat; but he laughed; and seemed inclined to treat her with a little gentle ridicule.

"There cannot be much forsaking, Amélie, on board ship, where we are thrown together the whole day long. All the same I will go with you, and very gladly."

He was about to turn to Mrs. Threepenny-bit; but the young lady anticipated him; she would have his usual companions come with her also; nay, she insisted on it, for she would not be guilty of dragging him away. Indeed, she was most kind and considerate all the way round; and was most solicitous about the comfort of her mother (whose eyes were even more than ordinarily anxious and troubled, one of us thought); and appeared rather to guard against looking Hitrovo's way. Then, again, when we had got into the stern of the steam-launch, and were making for shore, she said,

"Ernest, don't you think there should be a complete frankness between intimate friends when it comes to the giving of a little present? Why should there be shyness and secrecy, when you would like to know what would be most appreciated? And so I tell you now that I want to get a little present for you, here in Yalta; and you must be honest with me and let me know what would most please you. You see, this is the farthest point of this voyage; and I should like you to have some souvenir of it —perhaps engraved with Russian characters, if there is time—a little message from me to you, that would recall a good many things whenever you saw it. What do you think, now?—something you could attach to your watch-chain; and you would be continually seeing it, wherever you might be—for—for who knows what may happen in the world?—but always, wherever you might be, you would have this little token with you, and you could say 'Well, Amélie gave me that, the day we were at Yalta. This is the message it carries—that she did not want to be forgotten, ever.'"

She seemed a little nervous and hysterical this morning; for a second there was a suspicion of moisture about the long black lashes; but she hastily brushed the half-formed tears away.

"*You* and I," she continued, "have known each other long

enough, and intimately enough, to be quite frank; and you must come into a jeweller's shop with me, if there is such a thing in Yalta, and you must tell me what is best; you see, it is important—at least, I consider it important; it may have to speak to you, for me, through many, many years; and every time you look at it, you will say to yourself 'That was when Amélie and I were sailing together, long and long ago; and she did not want to be forgotten.'"

He regarded her in a kindly fashion.

"À Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca . . . nous êtions heureux là?"

She looked startled and confused for a second, and glanced quickly and stealthily towards Paul Hitrovo.

"I remember the lines," she said, "but I was never quite sure what de Musset meant—perhaps only a happy recollection—"

She could say no more, for at this moment the launch slowed in to the landing-stage, and we had to get out and ascend the wide stone steps.

This straggling contingent of foreigners, boldly headed by Amélie Dumaresq and her less self-assertive companion, now encountered a motley crowd, who stared with obvious curiosity; and little wonder, seeing that the *Orotania*, as we afterwards learned, was the third English steamer that had ever appeared in these waters. And perhaps we also stared curiously at this miscellaneous assemblage — Greeks, Arabs, Jews, and here and there a typical Russian peasant, thick-set, long-haired, sun-tanned, with a strangely patient, apathetic, submissive look in his eyes. Moreover, our arrival was opportune; this was some kind of public holiday—the little white-domed church perched high on the deep-green hill kept tolling from time to time, in soft and musical tones; and these idlers had come out to see what was to be seen. The most adventurous among them were already negotiating for the hire of boats, that they might go out and beg to be allowed to inspect the nondescript vessel that had come from far climes.

When we got away from the crowded quay we found the little white town quiet enough in the blaze of the noonday heat. And what may have mostly struck this little group of strangers, now wandering along, was the absence (in a watering-place) of big and prominent hotels, and the prevalence of neat and trim two-storied residences surrounded by well-kept gardens. But what Yalta was

like, or was not like, was speedily driven from our minds by something of greater moment. Amélie had at length found the jeweller's shop she sought. It was not a very pretentious establishment, the chief feature in the window being a series of heads of the Madonna, enamelled in colors, with rays of brass emanating all round; likewise there was some damaskeened silver and also a few things studded with uncut turquoises and amethysts that perhaps had a certain novelty about them. However, she would have Wolfenberg go into this place, to see if she could discover what she wanted; and at the same moment she turned to Hitrovo, who was standing by.

"Won't you come," said she, without addressing him either by Christian name or surname, "and help us? Perhaps they speak only Russian."

So he followed also; and the very instant he had disappeared, Mrs. Dumaresq turned quickly to the elder woman of our party.

"Has Amélie said anything to you?" she asked, in an eager and anxious undertone. "It was only this morning she told me. It is quite settled between her and Hitrovo."

"I have suspected as much during the last day or two," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, calmly. "And I made sure of it just now, as we were coming ashore in the launch."

"But what am I to do?" said the mother, who seemed in a most distracted and bewildered and helpless state. "I have no one to consult. I am quite unable to do anything, for Amélie would pay no heed to whatever I might say. And yet her uncle down in Florida will hold me responsible; and I ought to write to him; I must write to him; and at the same time I know what his first questions will be. He will want to be told all about the young man, about his character, his position, his prospects, and his family. But what am I to answer him?" she went on, in a piteous fashion. "What can I say? I am in absolute ignorance. And it is useless to remonstrate with Amélie—useless to ask her to postpone any definite arrangement until her Uncle Charles could come over. Of course, if this marriage is persisted in, he must come over in any case: there will be all the settlements to be seen to. If she were not so self-willed!—if she would only wait! You cannot tell these last few days how frightened I have been to see her open preference; I saw what it

would come to; and yet I knew it was no use interfering. And what am I to do now?—what can I do?"

Now it was not of Paul Hitrovo that the smaller woman was thinking, nor yet of Uncle Charles, nor even of Amélie Dumaresq herself: it was of another person altogether—it was of Wolfenberg. Nevertheless she had to respond to this tremulous and despairing appeal with such ordinary assurances as she could devise.

"I am certain," she said, "that any one who knows Amélie will not hold you responsible for any decision she may have come to; and surely a young woman should be allowed to choose for herself whom she will marry. And don't you think she has had plenty of opportunities of studying his character during this voyage? But—but—Mrs. Dumaresq, about Mr. Wolfenberg: have you told him?"

"That is another thing," the poor lady said quickly. "Would you be so very, very kind as to do that for me some time or other? He sits and talks with you in the evening; you could find some chance when there was no one to overhear; because, of course, it must be kept an absolute secret from the people on the ship. Your party were to know, she said, because you and Wolfenberg had become such intimate friends; and I was to tell Wolfenberg. But—but somehow I shrink from it—and it is so difficult to find an opportunity—and if you now would be so very, very kind—" At this moment the three who had gone into the shop reappeared; and she instantly added, with a studied indifference of voice and manner: "As I was saying, Amélie is well advised in giving her diamond case to the Purser, to be locked up in his strong box, whenever we come into a harbor. It would never do to have such things lying about in her cabin, and strangers coming on board."

That afternoon, on our return to the *Orotania*, Mrs. Threepenny-bit's state-room seemed the safest retreat, to be out of the way of our Russian visitors who were now swarming all over the vessel. And of course and at once the talk turned upon the announcement of the morning. It was a climax, to be sure, that all of us had foreseen; and yet the certainty of it, thus suddenly declared, produced something almost like dismay—when we thought of that other.

"So this is the end," said the smaller of the two women.

"This is the end of her romantic devotion and attachment. This is the end of her convictions about marriage being the great disillusionizer; about an exalted friendship and affection being the most perfect and most lasting relationship between a man and a woman of thoroughly sympathetic minds and tastes. This is the end of the atonement she proposed to make for what he had suffered elsewhere; the end of her courageous determination to stand by him, scorning the ordinary ways of life. And it is as I had feared all along," she continued, in a pensive way. "When you came to me, at first, Peggy, and described that ideal companionship, I confess it looked very beautiful and noble; but I asked you how any kind of permanence was to be secured for it. Human nature is strong; and the ordinary ways of life draw your feet into them whether you will or not."

"I don't believe it," said Peggy, bluntly. "That relationship between him and her might have continued to exist securely enough if only she had had a firmer and finer character, a more tenacious resolution, and a little less of the selfishness of a spoilt child. Did you never hear of a woman giving up thoughts of marriage because of what she considered a higher duty? I have, then, more than once, in my own small experience. But the simple fact is that Amélie Dumaresq is all-important to herself. Her strength of character doesn't lie in the way of sacrifice at all, but in a kind of impetuous belief that the whole of the surrounding world should be subservient to her, and should rejoice and acquiesce in whatever tends to her happiness. It is wonderful to look at—it is so child-like, so unconscious. You can hardly be angry with her, it is all so natural. And yet, Missis, when you think what it is you have to tell Wolfenberg—when you think what it means to him—"

She paused, and regarded her friend.

"I wish I had not undertaken any such task," the other said, slowly. "And yet I remember his face as he talked to me on the Acropolis at Athens. He has the most heroic unselfishness and an inflexible fortitude. It is not of his own share in this thing that he will speak, whatever he may suffer. I could almost tell you what he will say. It is her happiness, and that alone, that he will take into consideration."

"I think the best thing he can do," the younger woman said,

absently, "is to leave this ship as soon as ever we get back to Constantinople."

"Don't you remember, then, Peggy, that I thought he ought to have gone away long before we ever got there?"

"I suppose it is an inevitable consequence," her companion continued, almost unheeding. "When a married man falls in love with an unmarried young woman, misery is sure to come of it, for one or other of them, or for both. I know you don't think he is in love with her, at least consciously: you think the situation is entirely as she described it—a romantic companionship of two twin-souls; but his obedience to her slightest wish, his constant defence of her, his extraordinary admiration of whatever she does or says, his eager gratitude to you for any commendation of her, and the way his eyes soften with kindliness whenever he looks at her—well, if all that isn't love, I don't know the symptoms. At the same time, I quite agree with you that when you make this communication to him he will be quite reticent, and simple, and self-controlled; he will probably express pleasure, and ask when he may be allowed to take his congratulations to her; but don't you be deceived by that, Missis: there are deeps in that man's nature that he does not choose to reveal. I have not watched him so long and so closely for nothing."

And perhaps the elder woman would have been glad to have had her painful mission accomplished and off her mind, but that no chance offered itself during this evening. Hardly had the last of our Russian visitors left the ship than the dinner-hour was upon us; and, naturally, the big saloon was no place for private confidences. On the other hand, Amélie, on this occasion, claimed Wolfenberg as her own, and was kindness itself to him. She seemed a little excited and happy. She was immensely pleased with everything she had seen in Yalta, and especially with the serious bearing of the Russian country-folk.

"I thought they had a most vacant, unintelligent expression," put in Mrs. Dumaresq, rather peevishly: perhaps she had grown tired of praises of things Russian.

"Oh, matushka," cried the young lady—this being her newly-invented name for her mother—"how can you say so! I'm sure I preferred their dignified unconcern to the observant quickness and inquisitiveness of the Greeks and Jews. But then I don't like self-conscious smartness, and spryness, and shallow cleverness."

we get a good deal too much of that at home. I've often heard it said that the American eye is more alert than the European eye—"

"Do you know why that is so, Amélie?" Wolfenberg said, with a smile. "It is because the early settlers were trained to keep a sharp lookout if they meant to preserve their scalps."

"There is nothing to me more contemptible," she continued, pursuing her remorseless way, "than the funny young man in our country, his eyelids all quivering with his anxiety to say something humorous. And he need not be so concerned; it is so easily done. When one of our funny young men wants to make himself amusing, either in print or in talking, he has only to represent himself as the victim of all kinds of discomforts and humiliating experiences. It is an easy trick to raise a laugh. But I prefer a little dignity—a little self-respect. Why should people be so anxious to display their cleverness, their knowingness? Why should they want to show off, unless through some distressing consciousness of inferiority? For my part, I would rather have the insolent indifference of the Englishman than the eager self-assertion of the American. And I tell you I have a greater admiration for the grave and reserved manner and bearing of those Russian peasants than I have for all the nonchalance and nimble-wittedness of the very smartest of our hotel-clerks at home—"

"Amélie," the poor mother complained, "it is very strange that you should so have taken to running down your own country. You would be very angry if you heard any one else say such things."

She burst out laughing, quite good-humoredly.

"Why, then, do you drive me into argument, matushka? Why will you be so contentious? Why will you quarrel? I declare, when I looked at those Russian country people—there were some of them at the quay when we came away—I was very nearly going up to them, and saying to them, *da svidania!*"

"And what is that?" Wolfenberg said.

"'*Da svidania?*' Oh, that is *au revoir*," she made answer, with much cheerfulness.

Nor, again, after dinner, was there any opportunity of conveying this fateful piece of news to him, for Amélie herself detained him in the saloon. Was she going to play to him certain of

those plantation melodies for which he had a boyish fondness; or did she wish to show him her first groupings for the 'Oats-pease-beans' subject; or had she it in her mind to get the Russian, who also remained below, and him better acquainted? At all events, they did not for a long time make their appearance on deck, though the beauty of the night might well have tempted them: there was a full moon, and a perfectly glassy sea—the long and trembling lane of silver ran away out to the horizon line, where it widened, sharp and clear against the receding softness of the sky.

"I suppose I must wait until to-morrow," said one of two women who were slowly walking up and down, arm-in-arm, "though I would rather have it done with at once. To tell you the truth, Peggy, I am a little afraid. What you say about the way he will probably take the news is, no doubt, quite right; but still, when you imagine that a man is inwardly suffering, and outwardly steeling himself, it seems cruel to look on. And then I am an intruder. Why should I be asked to interfere—"

"Because that distressed creature of a mother is about out of her mind," said Peggy at once. "I should not be surprised if she telegraphed to the uncle in Florida to come over without delay. Let me see: what is the next port we call at—Moudanieh? And of course, one can telegraph from Asia Minor to the United States. But, even then, what would be the use? The thing is done. Amélie Dumaresq is not the sort of girl to be reasoned or threatened out of any resolve she has arrived at."

"I wish my message was delivered," her companion rejoined: clearly it was of Wolfenberg she was thinking—not of those others at all.

The Major came along.

"Splendid night, eh?—beautiful picture, ain't it?" said he, in his buoyant fashion. "Are you ladies going to wait up to see the start?—eleven-thirty prompt. Lights out at eleven, as usual; but there is little need for lights on a night like this."

"Eleven-thirty, did you say?" Lady Cameron asked.

"Eleven-thirty," he repeated. "And then we are off for home. And if we were to leave one of our passengers behind at this turning-point, he would find some difficulty in getting back to England, eh, wouldn't he?"

He grinned in a curious manner; but his meaning remained dark and impenetrable.

"Why should we leave any one behind?" asked Mrs. Threepenny-bit. "Surely, every one knows that we sail to-night?"

Again he grinned to himself, but he did not reply, for he had stepped into the moonlight to pick a cigar from his case; then, when he came back under the awning, he found that these two were talking of something else; and presently he had taken his departure, doubtless making away for those spacious and comfortable lower regions devoted to smoke, and cards, and cooling drinks.

They were now standing by the rail, looking wistfully at the wonderful scenic display before them: the white town asleep in the calm, wan radiance; the darkly-wooded lower hills, with here and there a châlet brought into sharp relief; then the mighty range of mountains, with mysterious breadths of forest; and far above these, towering into the serene and cloudless heavens, the precipitous crags and summits grown grey and spectral in the moonlight.

"Yes," said Peggy, "I seem to have drunk in happiness and enjoyment every moment since I came on board this ship; and yet there is something in the word 'home.' I dare say when we get to Greenock—and I do hope Ewen will manage to meet me at Malta, so that we may go home together—I dare say Greenock will be as rainy, and dirty, and grimy as usual; and it may be wet and windy going down the Firth; and perhaps freshening up to gales and storms as we get out west and make away for the north; but I don't care. I think, after these long weeks of blue seas and constant sunlight, I should like to watch Ardnamurchan headland growing black and terrible in the face of an Atlantic squall—"

"You like weather as is weather," her friend said. "They have taught you that at least in the West Highlands."

"I like a touch of wildness, anyway," she confessed, "—something to come along and shake the chromo-lithographic element out of the world around you. Give me an ulster, a Tam-o'-Shanter, and a pair of thick boots, and I don't want anything better than fighting my way down to the sea-shore in the teeth of a westerly gale, with the spindrift tasting salt. No, Missis, you won't catch me grumbling about Greenock and the rain and the

mud when I find myself on the quay, waiting for the big steamer with the two red funnels." She put her hand on the hand of her friend as they were both of them leaning with pensive elbows on the rail; and now she spoke in a lower voice—for there were people about: "Missis, do you remember the old rhyme?—it does for Greenock as well as any other seaport—

'O Greenock is a fine town, with ships in the bay,
And I wish from my heart it's there I was to-day;
I wish from my heart I was far away from here,
Sitting in my parlor and talking to my dear.
For it's home, dearie, home—it's home I want to be;
Our topsails are hoisted, and we'll away to sea:
O the oak, and the ash, and the bonny birken tree,
They grow so green in the North Countrie!'"

"And a very pretty specimen of an American you are!" her companion exclaimed: after which indisputable statement of fact nothing more was said on the subject. It is a far cry to Greenock from Yalta beyond the Chersonese.

At eleven all lights except the necessary ship's lights were extinguished; but that, as the Major had observed, was of little consequence; the whole of the world around us was illuminated by this mild white splendor that seemed to fill the slumbering air. Many had gone below for good; but a few had come up from the saloon to witness the start—among these being Amélie Dumaresq, her Russian lover, and Wolfenberg. Here, too, was Sappho, ecstatic about the spectral mountains; the Baby had joined her sister—and Julian Verrinder was in meek attendance; the Major alone was unaccountably absent. We waited, mostly in silence, counting the minutes; and, indeed, so perfect was the quietude astern that, just before seven bells struck, we heard a sudden splash some way further forward.

"What can that be?" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit.

"Perhaps the stokers throwing cinders overboard," Peggy suggested.

"Oh, nonsense! They never do that at this time of night," was the reply.

But there was no further thought of this thing, for at the same moment a vibration underneath us told us that the screw had begun to revolve. Peggy rose, and put her arm affectionately round her friend's waist.

"'It's home, dearie, home.'"

"Yes—and it's time to go below, too," responded her companion, as together they set out for their cabins.

Just then a figure was seen to emerge from the dark shadow underneath the boat-deck, to pass rapidly across by the engine-hatches, and to disappear in the direction of the stairs leading down to the fore-saloon.

"Wasn't that the Major?" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit.

"I think so," answered Peggy, looking puzzled.

"Why should he steal away from us like that," she demanded, "without saying good-night? And what did he mean by his mysterious talk about a passenger being left behind?"

But it was no time for the asking or answering of idle conundrums—it was time, rather, to get to bed.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### A MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

THERE is a story told of a Scotch minister who had married a remarkably ill-favored wife and who (perhaps to excuse himself before the people) was much given to vaunting her spiritual graces and excellences. "She is all glorious within," he remarked on one occasion to a neighbor. "Man, Jamie," replied the too-familiar friend, "it's a sair peety ye canna flipe her"—to *flipe*, in Scotland, meaning to turn a stocking inside out. And, if at times we were tempted to say something of the same sort of our perfervid poetess, our peerless Sappho—the splendor of whose soul found no fit exponent in her rather dowdy figure and lethargic features—there were other times in which she did her very best to appear cheerful, and sympathetic, and kind; and then we forgave her everything. On this particular morning, as we were laboring onwards through the brilliant and swift-glancing waters of the Black Sea, Sappho seemed pre-eminently amiable of mood.

"How good-natured those sailors are!" she said, as she came up to Lady Cameron and the Major. "I suppose it is the monotony of their lives makes them so fond of pets. Fancy their being before me even at this early hour; they have taken

Phaon out of his crate; and I have no doubt they have carried him off to give him a share of their breakfast."

"It is a good thing Phaon is not a parrot," observed Lady Cameron, demurely, "if they have taken him away into the forecastle."

At this, Sappho looked a little alarmed.

"Yes," said she, "I had not thought of that. Their manners may be rather rough." She turned to the quartermaster, who was arranging the deck chairs. "Quartermaster," she said, "would you be so kind as to go and fetch me my little dog? The men must have taken him below."

"Very well, madam," was the civil reply; and away the quartermaster went.

He was gone for a considerable time. When he returned, the news he brought with him was sufficient to paralyze the boldest: nothing could be seen or heard anywhere of the missing Phaon, while it was absolutely certain he had not been taken below by the sailors. Sappho did not appear to comprehend. She stared at the man in a stunned, bewildered fashion.

"Not in the ship? What do you mean?" she cried, in a gasping sort of way. "I don't understand you. He must be in this ship!—I saw him myself last night as late as eleven o'clock—I know he was not left ashore, for I brought him on board myself—he was safe in that crate—I saw him—I saw him myself—"

"It seems incredible that he should have jumped over the side during the night," observed the Major, regarding her calmly; "and yet how otherwise can one account for his disappearance? No one could be so inhuman as to pitch him overboard. It is true he has been rather snappy with some of the passengers; and I may say he bit myself yesterday morning; but that is nothing—nothing at all—a mere trifle—"

She turned from him impatiently, and addressed herself again to the quartermaster.

"Come and show me where you have looked—an instant search must be made—where is the butcher?—you must bring him before the Purser—before the Captain—there must not be a moment's delay—"

And therewith she dragged the man away with her—to arouse and scour the startled ship.

When we next *saw* Sappho, a marvellous change had come

over her. There was nothing left of the amiability of the morning; she had also passed out of that mood of blank consternation with which she had at first heard the news; she had become a tempestuous fury, with malignant hatred sparkling in her eyes and vibrating in her voice.

"Now I see—now I understand," she said to Lady Cameron—and, fortunately, the Major had gone away—"it is that fiend, that incarnate fiend, who has done it; I know it; I am convinced of it; and yet he had the hardihood to stare me in the face and say that no one could be so inhuman as to throw my poor little Phaon overboard! And I suppose he thinks the same monstrous effrontery will carry him through now? The darkness of the night covered the scoundrelly and treacherous and murderous deed; and, therefore, he is to escape? But he shall not!" Miss Penguin went on, with a vehemence of passion that was terrible to see. "He shall not escape! He may try to brazen it out with denials; he may call for proofs, for witnesses; and, of course, I have no proofs, and no witnesses. But what will he say when he receives a slap in the face? A slap in the face; yes, and from a man who can fight, too—from Anton Ruhe. I will appeal to my friend Anton Ruhe—"

"Oh, Miss Penguin!" Peggy exclaimed, in gentle deprecation. This Anton Ruhe we all of us knew as a fire-eating revolutionary (in the monthly magazines, chiefly), and what might he not do if called upon to avenge a wronged and insulted damsel? "Do you think it is fair to accuse any one without evidence? And is it so very serious, after all? Supposing—just supposing"—she went on (for she had a distinct recollection of seeing a suspicious figure skulk across the moonlit deck on the preceding night)—"supposing some one had been bitten by the dog, or had a dislike to it, and supposing that person, whoever he is, really did throw Phaon overboard, just as the ship was starting last night, it was hard-hearted enough, no doubt; but all the same not much harm could have been done, for Phaon would simply swim ashore; and he may live many, many years in Russia, in perfect happiness—"

"No," said Sappho, with a certain dignity; "I cannot cheat my mind by considering impossibilities. Phaon was—was rather stout; he could never reach the shore. He has been cruelly murdered, and I know by whom. And knowing who the coward is, *do you think* I will let him escape? I tell you my vengeance will

reach him, in spite of all the oaths and perjuries he may bring to blacken his face with. A slap on the cheek! He wears Her Majesty's uniform: how will he take a slap on the cheek? Anton Ruhe will come when I call him; and then we will see how denials and subterfuges will serve that base and brutal murderer. My poor Phaon!—my poor Phaon!—" And here she turned aside, furtively pulling out her handkerchief; and we also withdrew, for sorrow is sacred; but it was Lady Cameron who went and sought out the Major, and told him that, if he really had been guilty of this atrocious and abominable crime, he would hear more about it as soon as he reached England. The Major looked at her—looked steadfastly at her eyes, but did not commit himself to speech.

There were no land-features to attract attention during this blazing and basking day; we had nothing around us save the tumultuous tossing and heaving of the blue-black waves, with a blinding shimmer of diamonds away towards the sun. Accordingly, our good Orotanians settled themselves down to their usual occupations—chess, cribbage, letter-writing, reading, and conversation in quiet corners; and the time went by pleasantly enough until Peggy appeared once more upon the scene.

"What has become of Emily?" she demanded. "I haven't caught a glimpse of her all the morning. Surely, he can't have thrown *her* overboard?"

Well, when one came to think of it, the Baby had not been visible since breakfast.

"She may have been invited into the chart-house," one ventured to suggest. "We shall be going through the Bosphorus again to-morrow, and the younger officers are always very civil."

"Where is Mr. Verrinder?" she said, looking round sharply.

There was no Mr. Verrinder. No, nor was Ernest Wolfenberg anywhere to be seen. Had this diabolical Major been dealing death and destruction all the way round? At all events, we formed a search-party—it was something to pass the time withal—and proceeded to explore the ship. When we came upon the truants, they formed a very engaging group. We found them in the fore-saloon—a section of the vessel rarely occupied during the day, except, perhaps, by a chance lady's-maid engaged in needlework; and they were up at the further end, under the broad glare of the skylights. *Wolfenberg* was at work on the portrait-picture;

his model sat some little distance off; and close to her, and face to face with her, was young Verrinder. So far as we could make out, Wolfenberg was not listening; his absent eyes were fixed on the upright board before him, as though he were intent on reading suggestions into the outlines there; so that the young folk were left to entertain each other, and were apparently doing so, very much to their mutual satisfaction. And the subject? Round the Baby's head, and falling upon her shoulders, were some folds of silken gauze—black, with here and there a white star. Was she personating the Dawn, then—the shadows of night still hanging over her yet, with the smile of the new day lighting up her face? For clearly this was no sombre theme. We could imagine Julian Verrinder's having begged and prayed that the picture should be as much a portrait as possible; perhaps he had humbly entreated for some little cheerfulness also; perhaps the artist had good-naturedly assented; perhaps he had even said to the young man, 'Very well, you sit and talk to her; amuse her; the more animation in her face the better.' So here were Ferdinand and Miranda, entirely wrapped up in themselves, eyes answering eyes, smiles answering smiles; while the solitary magician, busy with his spells and dreams, was as good as a thousand miles away.

It was a very charming group, viewed from the dim twilight of this corridor; but it did not at all seem to please Lady Cameron.

"Really," said she, "it is most inconsiderate of Mr. Verrinder to interfere. How can Mr. Wolfenberg get on with his work if she is kept laughing and chattering? Her face is naturally calm and serious. And she is too amiable to resent his intrusion."

"She certainly does not seem to resent it," observed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, gravely.

"Besides, I don't like the notion of his becoming possessed of that picture," she proceeded, with unwonted displeasure marking her tone. "It is not right. His having it might lead to quite ridiculous conjectures on the part of a stranger; and Emily does not understand such things; she is easily led; she will do anything to be obliging; and it does not occur to her that it is an impertinence on Mr. Verrinder's part to ask her for her portrait, for that is what it comes to. I don't like it at all—"

At this moment Wolfenberg rose and stepped back a yard or two to regard his work; then he returned to the table, and laid *down his* palette—the model was to have a few seconds' rest. And,

thereupon, Lady Cameron and her companions made bold to enter the saloon.

"I hope we have not interrupted you," said she, going forward to Wolfenberg—but taking scrupulous care not to overlook the sketch. "Did you hear us talking in the corridor? No? I'm afraid you'll find Emily a bad sitter; she ought not to be laughing and chatting when you are studying her face—"

"Oh, but I am responsible for that, Lady Cameron," said young Verrinder, blushing furiously. "And—and it was with Mr. Wolfenberg's permission. You don't suppose I would do anything to endanger the likeness; it is a matter of too great moment—of course I don't mean the likeness," he went on, stammering and blundering, "but the picture—Mr. Wolfenberg said I might come and sit and talk—he rather wished her to have a cheerful expression—he said I might come and talk to her—"

"The fact is," Wolfenberg interposed, in his equable and kindly fashion, "it was a pure piece of laziness on my part. I wanted your sister to look interested; and I ought myself to have tried to talk to her; but I thought a simpler way would be to get Mr. Verrinder to come and chat with her. It is so easy for two young people to amuse each other; while an old fogey has to labor at it—until his model is like to fall asleep." He took up his palette again. "No, you need not go—if you care to stay," he said. "I want to have Miss Emily forget that I am looking at her: it does not matter how many are talking to her."

But it was clear that our presence was embarrassing to those two young people who had been thus unexpectedly caught. The poor Baby was no longer smiling with the smile of the dawn, under the soft folds of the departing night; self-conscious color was in her face; her great eyes were timid and confused. Julian Verrinder, too, had been struck dumb; his anxious schemes for the success of this treasure of a picture had been set at naught; it was we who were the intruders. And so we came away again—leaving Ferdinand and Miranda to entertain each other in their sea-bound cave, while the arch-magician (who had perhaps planned this little arrangement out of mere sympathy and kindness of heart) would no doubt return to his incantations and spells, and that so as not to interfere too much with their pretty occupation.

Now this withdrawal of Wolfenberg from his customary haunts afforded Mrs. Threepenny-bit some measure of unlooked-for re-

lief; it was an excuse for her postponing the fulfilment of the onerous task that had been placed upon her. And there is no doubt the small woman shrank from that with an ever-increasing apprehension, despite her professions of confidence in Wolfenberg's firmness and fortitude and unselfish courage.

"After all, Peggy," she said, "however he may take it, it is something to have the plans for one's lifetime suddenly shattered, and just as he seemed to be looking forward to long years of sympathy and affection and close companionship. And if it was a delusion to think that such a bond could be made secure and permanent, it was she who led him into the delusion: who could have spoken about it with greater enthusiasm than herself? And why should I have to go and tell him that all these dreams were a mockery—that she has thrown him over, abandoned her career, forgotten all her fine ambitions, simply because of the mysterious charm of a young Russian's blue-grey eyes? I suppose what she has done is only natural—it is like a woman—"

"It is not like a woman at all!" said Peggy, with some warmth. "It is the action of a spoilt, heartless, thoughtless coquette. The only fine thing about it is the very magnificence of her selfishness and unconcern; I dare say she will take it quite as a matter of course that he should congratulate her, that he should be well content, and even delighted at being allowed to look on at her happiness—"

She stopped. By this time the evening had drawn on; there was a full moon, of a dull saffron hue, in the southeast; and across the lapping waters shone a curious golden-green radiance, broken everywhere by the sharp shadows of the waves. The two women were standing by the rail, talking in an undertone. But there now approached them a creature all in white, or perhaps in pale yellow and white; she was dressed for dinner and bareheaded; she swung her handkerchief to and fro; she was singing to herself, and that in a careless fashion—

'Afar from her his heart is breaking'

—and we recognized the familiar 'Troika' air. But when she came up she said, cheerfully enough—

"Has any one seen anything of Mr. Wolfenberg? I hear he has been at work all day; but he can't be painting now. Ah, well, he will turn up at dinner-time, anyhow." And off she went

*SHE WAS DRESSED FOR DINNER AND BAREHEADED; SHE SWUNG HER HANDKERCHIEF TO AND FRO.*

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again, through the mysterious twilight, like some large phantasmal white moth.

Mrs. Threepenny-bit looked after her.

"I wish she would go and find him," she said, bitterly, "and take him the story of her broken faith herself!"

"Oh, Missis, she could hardly do that!" Peggy exclaimed. "A girl is always shy about her engagement—about the first one, any way; and however case-hardened and confident Amélie Dumaresq may be—still, the relations between her and Wolfenberg have been peculiar—"

"But why should I be dragged in!" the elder woman again protested, almost with indignation. "I am an outsider. Why should I be asked to undertake a duty that may be painful beyond words? It isn't fair—"

"You are Wolfenberg's friend," Peggy said, persuasively. "The mother, who ought to tell him, is nervous and afraid; she has appealed to you; and I don't see anybody who could break the news to him with equal tact and delicacy. So you've got to do it, Missis; and Wolfenberg himself will be grateful to you, I am certain."

But still she hesitated, dreading she hardly knew what. After dinner that evening, these two were again on deck. The moon was higher and clearer now; and the light on the water was of a brilliant silver, splintering itself on the jagged edges of the waves. Of course on such an exquisite evening no human creature could think of remaining in the saloon; so that there were more people walking about than usual; nevertheless there still remained a corner where one could talk in quiet.

"Did you hear what the Dumaresqs propose to do?" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, eagerly, to her friend. "They mean to go with the indefatigables this time—that is, to-morrow afternoon, as soon as we reach Moudanieh: there is to be a general stampede ashore, and hiring of carriages, and driving away inland to Broussa, to pass the night there, and have the whole of the next day for the bazaars. At least, I gather that is what the Dumaresqs have in view; I should not wonder if Amélie wanted a lot of silks and stuffs from Asia Minor to form part of her trousseau. Now, do you see this, Peggy: if we decide to remain on board to-morrow afternoon—driving out to Broussa the next morning—I am quite certain that Mr. Wolfenberg will prefer to stay with us;

and then, the ship being practically empty, ourselves all by ourselves, wouldn't that be a safe opportunity to convey that message to him, without fear of interruption? Don't you think, Peggy, I ought to wait till to-morrow evening? Mrs. Dumaresq has left it to my own discretion; and, of course, I want to make sure that there will be no onlooker—no stranger—coming about."

Well, Peggy agreed; she had not the heart to grudge this respite to her friend, who seemed singularly anxious; so that the evil hour was again put off, until the following evening, when we should find ourselves in solitary occupation of the ship.

Early next morning we encountered a bit of a rough-and-tumble down towards the southwestern limits of the Black Sea; but by and by a change to smoother water told us we had entered the Bosphorus; and eventually all motion ceased—the screw no longer throbbed—we were in a strange and unaccountable stillness. Dressing was hurried over; we got upon deck; and then the explanation was obvious—we were waiting for permission to pass; in other words, the Doctor and Purser had gone ashore for pratique. Opposite us were the frowning batteries of Kavak—massive forts and bastions bristling with cannon; while through the silence of the morning rang the shrill and melancholy bugle-call of the Turkish soldiers. And, after all, our period of detention was not unreasonably long; the Purser and Doctor returned to the ship; and presently we had resumed our route—making away down through the narrow Straits that separate the European and Asian worlds.

And here was the timid and blushing Baby coming up to Wolfenberg with a startling proposal.

"Mr. Wolfenberg," said she, and there was a kind of abashed appeal and hesitation in the large and soft and winning eyes, "if you would rather go on with the picture, you must tell me frankly. I—I hope you will study your own convenience—that is, any time you wish I will go along to the fore-saloon—now, if you like—"

He looked at her—in no unkindly fashion. Well he knew who had put this suggestion into her young mind.

"No, no," said he, "I could not accept such a piece of self-sacrifice. Don't you know that the shores of the Bosphorus are extraordinarily beautiful, and as interesting as they are beautiful; *and yet* you would go away down below, and sit constrained, and

see nothing of what was going by? Tell Mr. Verrinder not to be so impatient—so impetuous."

It was a random shaft, and not meant to wound; but it struck home all the same, and the Baby retired in sad confusion. Her sister, on the other hand, seemed a little incensed by this proposal.

"Mr. Verrinder?" she said to Wolfenberg. "Do you think it was he who prompted Emily to come to you just now and make that offer? Really, I think he is going too far! What right has he to interfere at all?"

"Young men are naturally impatient," Wolfenberg said.

"Young men are naturally impertinent!" she made answer. "But I will warn Emily. She must keep him at a proper distance. The idea of his going secretly to her and suggesting that you should be asked to shut yourself up at one of the most interesting parts of the voyage! You see, Emily is so simple a kind of creature, so innocent of anything like concealment or secrecy, she does not understand that these confidences are really compromising. Why should he go to her instead of coming straight to you? I like the young fellow very well; he is frank and modest, good-looking and well-mannered, pleasant enough in every way; but I must see he does not presume on Emily's ignorance of the world. She must keep him in his place. And I hope, Mr. Wolfenberg, that if he does become possessed of that picture, it will be so clearly an allegorical subject that no one could possibly mistake it for a portrait of Emily—it would be too absurd for him to have *that*."

And so, after all, the ingenuous mind of the Baby was not deprived of its series of brilliant object-lessons. The varied and beautiful panorama passed gradually before her eyes — wood-crowned heights, ruddy of soil, with dark-green foliage; then white and pink villages stretching along the shore and scattered here and there on the hill-sides; deeply-indented bays, with English yachts and every kind of foreign craft lying at anchor; ancient walls and fortifications, with tall Genoese towers; and now and again a spacious palace, a lordly pleasure-house, shining in white splendor amidst overhanging and luxurious gardens. As we steamed slowly by the quays of Tophane and came once more in sight of the Golden Horn, a slight morning haze still hung over the *great city, over* the crowded domes and minarets, and

over the grey mosques and black cypresses of Stamboul. The sun was hot; the still water shimmered in the light; this was altogether more like the Constantinople of pictorial tradition; and this was the vision, vast and imposing, that stealthily and imperceptibly receded from us as we again got under way, making for the wider spaces of the Sea of Marmora, and the distant shores of Asia Minor.

It was a dream-like kind of day. Now and again we passed a motionless ship, its yellow sails reflected vividly on the glassy plain; but for the most part we seemed to be gliding into a voiceless and mysterious ocean, with nothing but a film of land along the southern horizon visible through the haze of heat. And then, towards the afternoon, as we were crossing the Gulf of Moudanieh, the ghost of a mountain appeared, far away inland and towering above the hills nearer the coast: this vague phantom of a thing was the Bithynian Mount Olympus. The land drew nearer; we began to make out colors. Then more particular features: green slopes of olive and mulberry coming down to the shore; a scattered little red-roofed village, with two or three white minarets; a rude wooden pier jutting out from the line of breaking surf. Finally came the sudden roar of the anchor-chain; and we were now lying off Moudanieh, the Greek village which serves as port to the once-famous Broussa.

It all fell out as Mrs. Threepenny-bit had predicted. The Dumaresqs and their Russian friend went away with the busy folk who had resolved on at once setting out for Broussa; and Wolfenberg, who had not been consulted about this arrangement, nor even pressed to join, seemed to prefer remaining on board, especially when he found he was to have some small measure of company. Practically, we had the whole ship to ourselves; and again and again on this still and beautiful evening—a full moon was shining over the distant village and over the olive-crowned slopes, while not a sound broke the slumbering silence—again and again the unwilling and anxious intermediary had an opportunity of fulfilling her mission; and just as often her courage failed her. Nay, it was not until we were assembled in the saloon at dinner—the two or three of us—that she found sufficient nerve; she seemed to want help; she would treat this thing as an ordinary piece of news—though under a pledge of secrecy.

"*Oh, Mr.* Wolfenberg," said she, with a smile—a ghastly

smile, when one knew that her heart was throbbing like to suffocate her, "I have something to tell you—and yet I suppose you may have guessed—but a girl does not like to speak of such things—and—and so I have been asked to let you know: it is about Amélie." He said nothing: he only regarded her. Then she hurried on breathlessly: "It is quite settled between her and Mr. Hitrovo: she has accepted him."

No one dared to look his way. If there was any quick quiver of the eyes, any sudden paleness of the lips at this abrupt confirmation of what he must have for some time back suspected, it was unseen. And when he spoke, after a second of constrained silence, it was with a studied and perfect calmness that showed an admirable fortitude and self-command.

"It is quite settled, then?" he asked, in rather a low voice.

"Yes," she answered; but then she was driven to add in a desperate kind of way: "Of course, who can tell what may happen?—who can tell? It is settled, I understand—yes, at present—but she might see fit to change her mind; and she has strength of character enough to carry out any decision—"

"If Amélie Dumaresq marries," he said, slowly, "the world will have lost a great artist."

Not a word about himself, nor about the wreckage of all the fine and wistful schemes he and she had planned together. Perhaps he had not had time to realize that as yet. It was of her alone he was thinking.

"And it may be she is right; it may be that is the true way," he said, absently. "But what a responsibility the man undertakes. In her case disappointment would mean destruction; and to destroy a life like hers, so full of splendid capacities, so passionately eager, so hopeful, and ardent, and overbrimming with the joy of existence— No, it is not to be thought of, or spoken of," he said again. "Amélie was born to be happy. Happiness appears to surround her; she seems to breathe it as the very atmosphere in which she lives. Well, well: good-bye to the famous artist—now we have to look forward to the happy wife."

All this was very brave—and reassuring, indeed; there was not a trace or symptom of any inward anguish; his idle schemes and dreams might go—what were they as compared with the pulsating hopes and desires of a rich young life? Only we noticed that he did not come up on deck after dinner, as was his wont.

He remained below in the saloon, his face in shadow, an unopened book in his hand, his fingers clenched round it. And it is to be imagined that none of us were anxious to break in upon this dark hour of retrospect, and renunciation, and forecast.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### IN A BAZAAR

Now it is impossible that sunrise on the coast of Asia Minor can be very different from sunrise anywhere else, yet nevertheless this is what we beheld, looking shorewards about six in the morning: a sky of pale, translucent silver grey, a sea almost as pale but faintly touched with azure, and then, between those two worlds of wan and ethereal hue, the land—beach, houses, hills, and woods—all of a solid, deep, rich bronze red. It was a marvel, a bewilderment of color. But here was Peggy coming briskly along the deck.

"Quick!" said she. "You can read it before any one turns up—and of course it is a secret. She finished it only yesterday—she has not been writing much of late—she has been so upset over the loss of Phaon. But this is something, I can tell you—"

A piece of paper changed hands: it was a document the handwriting of which was easily recognizable, even if there could be any doubt about the authorship of these savage stanzas—

Black ravens croak above the wood,
(*Pile high the blazing fire!*)
Sir Hugh lies weltering in his blood.
(*White heats of wild desire!*)

Loud laughs his dame: her fierce eyes shine:
(*Pile high the blazing fire!*)
Her leman laps the luscious wine.
(*White heats of wild desire!*)

'Demon and lover, tell me true
(*Pile high the blazing fire!*)
Where met ye, then, the red Sir Hugh?'
(*White heats of wild desire!*)

'Down by the bitter banks of Cart:
(*Pile high the blazing fire!*)
Three daggers quiver in his heart.'
(*White heats of wild desire!*)

'For this one night, I trow it well,
(*Pile high the blazing fire!*)
Our souls will shriek in deepest hell.'
(*White heats of wild desire!*)

"Yes?" said Peggy, with professed anxiety.

"Did you ever hear of 'The Twa Corbies'?"

"Oh, how atrociously mean!" she cried. "That is the critic all over! You can't deny that the thing is just splendid; and so you must suggest that she borrowed the idea from somewhere. I never heard of 'The Twa'—'The Twa'—what?—and I am certain Miss Penguin never heard of it either. Why will literary people be so spiteful—"

At this point she was interrupted—and had to thrust the paper dexterously into her pocket. It was Mrs. Threepenny-bit who appeared at the head of the companion, and with her was Ernest Wolfenberg. Those two were talking together as they came along: it was only the last fragment or two of their conversation that reached us.

"Did you hear whether Amélie proposed going back to America?" he asked, with his eyes bent on the deck. "Or—or are they going to settle in Europe—after the marriage?"

"Oh, I don't in the least know," she answered him. "I should very much doubt whether anything of the kind has been arranged as yet. But you will hear from herself. Now that the ice has been broken, there is no cause for any shyness on her part. And of course you will give her your congratulations—"

"Oh, yes, of course I must do that," he said, rather absently. "Of course—naturally—the first opportunity—perhaps when I see her to-day." After that, silence.

But indeed there was nothing of the kill-joy about this man as we proceeded to get ashore, on our way to Broussa. Grave and reserved he was, but not beyond his wont; in fact, at times there was even a sort of assumed and resolute cheerfulness in his manner. In the squalid main thoroughfare of the little village he stood apart somewhat, regarding with interest the costumes of the inhabitants and the droves of small donkeys bearing panniers

filled with vintage-grapes; he listened to the bargainings for a carriage; he was even amused by the unexpected apparition of Julian Verrinder, mounted on a somewhat sorry steed, and yet valiantly offering to be our escort. Did not we know that this part of the coast swarmed with brigands? Had we not heard of the two merchants of Broussa who had recently been carried off and held to ransom? The Baby, who had considerately insisted on getting up beside the driver of the carriage, so that we should have Wolfenberg along with us, overheard all this, and looked admiring and grateful thanks with her big, gentle eyes. It was a pity that Rosinante had not a more gallant look: the young man was well enough.

Our route at first lay through interminable groves of mulberry, olive, and cypress; but by and by we had to face a long and gradual ascent that in course of time brought us spacious views both by land and sea. Of course this was all collar-work for the hapless horses; so the driver, having fastened the reins, amused himself by making a series of incursions into the neighboring thickets and vineyards, returning with armfuls of quinces and grapes (the former with branch and leaf) which he politely presented to the three ladies. It was a friendly little act; and no doubt they would have liked to enter into conversation with him in return, but that they had already discovered it was of no use trying anything of the kind. We observed that he was particularly careful in selecting uninjured bunches of grapes to offer to his gentle neighbor on the box-seat; it was the old story; innocent and amiable eyes can work wonders anywhere—even when no speech is possible.

We ascended to a great height, and eventually looked abroad over an immense and fertile plain, with, far beyond it, the vast and shadowy bulk of Mount Olympus rising into the pale summer sky. Then, after a considerable rest on the summit, we began the descent—a process that speedily became a headlong downward rush, the horses at full gallop, the carriage pitching and swaying and swinging, the dust rolling away in volumes. Indeed, we had grown so little familiar with such pranks and antics on board the staid and demure *Orotania* that now, in solely devoting ourselves to clinging on to this vehicle gone daft, we somehow lost sight of Julian Verrinder altogether. Had our *cavalier* been spirited away by the very brigands with whom he

had threatened us; or was it those envious clouds of dust that hid him from the Baby's wistful eyes? For our own part, we could only clutch on to the sides of this unholy craft, that rolled and pitched and swung us about, in a sea far rougher than any we had encountered since leaving England; until, at long and length, we began to draw near the plain; then a grey horseman became occasionally visible through the clouds; finally a halt was called in the welcome shade of a grove of tall chestnuts, where there was a small wayside caravansary and water for the animals; and here the Baby was at last assured that her lover had not been carried off by any ruthless Turks.

From this resting-place onwards to Broussa it seemed to us that we were driving through a perpetual and magnificent garden, the rich green vegetation of which was especially grateful to eyes long accustomed to the colors of the sea. A most fertile and busy land; luxuriant maize, figs, mulberries, tobacco, and olives; groups of brightly-dressed peasants at work in the fields as if they had just stepped out of an opera; oxen and buffaloes toiling along the dusty road with wagons of merchandise; droves of camels at their mid-day encampment: it was altogether a varied and interesting scene, and a sufficient distraction for any of us who may have been looking forward, with some little apprehension, to a certain meeting. Then Broussa itself: domes, minarets, villas perched high on the terraced slopes of Olympus, among abundant verdure: this also seemed a place of cheerful aspect. We drove up to the hotel; there were one or two Orotanians loitering about the steps, and from them we learned that there was some kind of luncheon going forward; we should find our friends upstairs. We entered; ascended the wide staircase to the first floor; and here a din of voices immediately told us where our shipmates were assembled.

It was a long and lofty apartment, with a table coming right down the centre; and this table, at a first glance, seemed to be quite sufficiently occupied. Wolfenberg shrank back a little.

"No," he said, "I don't like going in amongst so many—we should only inconvenience them—cannot we get a room to ourselves?"

But during that second of hesitation the small group at the door had been observed; and the next instant there came quickly along the room, from the very furthest end of it, a young lady

of impetuous mien and carriage, with delight and welcome and reproach all shining and smiling in her lustrous black eyes. She carried us away in a whirlwind of words. We were the most mysterious people! Why had we not driven out the previous afternoon, like everybody else? But now there were some places, up by herself and her mamma; she would secure them for us; she would make way. Then she turned to Wolfenberg—who had been rather in the background, regarding her.

"Ernest," said she, holding out her hand (and there was something of a shy flush on her cheek), "I have not said good-morning to you yet. It was too bad of you not to come along yesterday—"

He took her hand, and held it for a brief moment.

"I was told something last night, Amélie," he said, in his grave and simple way. "My congratulations—my best wishes."

There was a quick look of pleasure and pride in her eyes.

"Oh, if you only knew!—But another time, Ernest." And therewithal she swept the little party of new-comers with her into the room; and marched at the head of them, with unusual color and animation in her face; and in a tempestuous sort of way she would make room for them. Even when we had all got places with sufficient ease, she seemed excitedly anxious to talk, and entertain, and amuse. Then she would have Paul Hitrovo do this and do that; until he, with great good-nature, seeing that the few waiters were not capable of coping with this influx of strangers, got up from his chair and formally constituted himself the squire of these dames. But it was Wolfenberg's glass that Amélie Dumaresq filled first—she poured the wine out with her own hands.

Then, again, directly after luncheon, she would have us go to look at the mosques and the bazaars, firing the imagination of our womankind with wonderful tales of the startling colors of the Broussa silks. Yet somehow or other, as soon as we were outside, it was to Wolfenberg she chiefly addressed herself. It was to him she pointed out the Elizabethan-looking houses of beams and plaster, with their red-tiled roofs, and their projecting upper story, supported by carved woodwork. It was his attention she drew to the strange green twilight formed at the entrance to the bazaars by the overarching trellises hanging with vines. *And when* she had conducted her friends to certain stalls, and set

them on to inspect the rich stores of wares and fabrics, then she seemed to think she had done her part; she turned to Wolfenberg, and claimed him altogether; she and he stood a little way out of the stream of traffic, by themselves.

These Broussa labyrinths have not the mysterious austerity of many Eastern bazaars; they are more modern, and brisk, and busy; and the noise and clatter, especially in the neighborhood of the iron-workers' shops, are indescribable. In this turmoil and confusion there was better opportunity for confidences between those two than in the silence of mid-ocean; and although no word could be overheard by any one but themselves, it was easy to see what an eager story she had to tell. Eager and yet shy—a broken story—sometimes her face was timidly downcast. We noticed, too, another onlooker—the anxious mother. She did not dare to intervene. She pretended to be interested in those gauzy silken neckerchiefs and Turkish dressing-gowns. But we could guess that she was secretly and wholly rejoiced to see in what a kindly and encouraging way Wolfenberg appeared to receive those confessions; he would still be the friend and confidant of both mother and daughter; either could go to him in time of need. *Ding-ding! tack, tack, tack!* went the hammers of the iron-workers; swarthy merchants, perched high on their stalls, shook out their gay stuffs, and vociferously called for custom; beggars, old and young, extended skinny palms, and whined; the drivers of the heavily-laden pack-mules urged forward the slow-swaying beasts through the unwilling throng. And amid these surroundings—as we conjectured—a love-tale was told.

But they could not remain thus dissociated forever; and, indeed, an incident now occurred that not only restored Amélie Dumaresq to her companions, but was like to have had evil consequences for all of us. There came along, accompanied by a soldier armed with musket and bayonet, an official of some sort who carried in his hand a formidable-looking whip of several tails; and with this weapon he served out rough-and-ready punishment as the occasion required. To us he seemed somewhat indiscriminate in his procedure; it may be that he recognized old offenders; or perhaps he merely hit out here and there at random to keep things going, for there were many loiterers and beggars, and the ways were narrow. There was not much bru-

tality; we observed that when he struck at a woman, it was generally about the skirts; only it is not pleasant to see a man flogging a woman, in whatever fashion. But, as bad luck would have it, just as he came by our group of folk, he caught sight of a little old creature who had doubtless been guilty of some delinquency; he brought the lash smartly across her shoulders; and the poor old woman, with a whimpering cry, fled hurriedly away. Now it was no business of ours to interfere; each country has its own laws and customs; besides—we were in Asia Minor. But Amélie Dumaresq was far too impulsive and firm-nerved to take any such considerations into account. She stepped straight up to the man—the blood all gone from her face; she snatched the whip out of his hand, and dashed it on the ground; while she gave him of her mind freely, in voluble and indignant French. The tall and grave official probably did not understand one of these scathing and scornful words. He appeared to be neither astonished nor angry. He looked at her, with his dark, lack-lustre eyes. Then he looked at us one by one. And at the same moment—indeed, it all happened in a moment—Paul Hitrovo had stepped forward to intervene and apologize; he lifted and restored the whip, with further apologies and explanations—all in French; while it is highly probable that he may have employed another and more intelligible language (for the *medjidjieh* is persuasive, and half a dozen of them carry weight); at all events the awarder of stripes, having again regarded us with his cold and sullen eye, went on his way.

"Amélie, how could you be so mad!" the frightened mother exclaimed. But the daughter was not frightened: her pale lips were still proud and indignant.

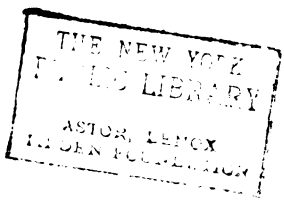
"I think," said Paul Hitrovo, grimly, as he regarded the retreating officer, "we might as well clear out of this place before he has had time to change his mind. If you ladies have completed your purchases—well, you might come and see the tiles in the Green Mosque."

It was not until the afternoon of the following day, as we were driving back to Moudanieh, that we learned something of what Amélie Dumaresq had confided to Wolfenberg in the bazaars of Broussa.

"She is simply over-brimming with happiness," he said.

"*Did* she tell you whether she had entirely given up her art

THE POOR OLD WOMAN, WITH A WHIMPERING CRY, FLED HURRIEDLY AWAY. AMÉLIE DUMARESQ STEPPED STRAIGHT UP TO THE MAN.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schemes?" asked Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with a certain chilliness of manner. "Did she say anything about a studio in London—in conjunction with you? Or is that all abandoned?"

"She seems to have no projects," he answered her, simply enough. "She is overwhelmed by this new and wonderful thing; she can think of nothing else. For hers is a strong nature: whatever interests her interests her wholly."

"Yet she seems to be able to change her views of life and her own plans without much trouble," observed his friend—who was thinking of him far more than he was thinking of himself, we made sure.

"It is her intense absorption in the present moment that enables her to do that," said this unshaken champion. "It has always been like that with Amélie. What immediately surrounds her is of the first and last importance; she becomes wholly preoccupied and engrossed. Then everything is so real to her; she grasps it; she has no doubt or hesitation—"

"What about marriage being the great disillusionizer?" said the other, vindictively. "I thought that was one of her theories."

"Yes," said he in reply, but rather wincing. "One of her theories—yes. But when the great facts and experiences of life come along, then theories have to be put aside: it is the way of the world."

He spoke without bitterness; nay, with a certain serenity that might have led one to suppose he had heard nothing but the best of news; and despite the small sub-acid remarks of the woman opposite him, he would have nothing but commendation of Amélie's conduct and her choice. Sometimes his defence of her grew almost warm; he seemed to forget that it was solely on his own account that this not unsympathetic acquaintance of his was inclined to be resentful—far more deeply resentful and indignant, indeed, than she chose to reveal in words.

"And Mr. Hitrovo—what about him?" she proceeded, in the remorseless way of women who have formed an unreasoning antipathy against any one. "What is the extraordinary attraction that has so captivated her? What is his character—his disposition—his particular quality of mind? I suppose you know Feuerbach's saying, that a being without attributes is non-existent: well, to me Mr. Hitrovo seems to be non-existent, except for a pair of clear eyes. Yes, he has those. And are they enough?

"Lure that man out with us to the ship," one managed to say to him privately. "Wait till Sadoolah, or Yadoolah, or whatever his name is, comes on board. Confront them with each other in the awful presence of the Purser. Then there will be an end."

There was, as it turned out: an end short and summary; but Sappho, who later on came to hear of the incident, went about the ship lamenting that the Turks had not shut up a certain 'brute' and 'fiend' in one of their most loathsome prisons, and whipped him with knotted whips.

We sailed about six o'clock, steaming out into the Sea of Marmora as the dusk fell. When we came on deck after dinner, the moon was shining full and clear, and a broad lane of silver trembled on the placid waters. And perhaps the calm beauty of the night had something to do in assuaging the nervous fears of this anxious mother, who now came along to our favorite corner, bringing with her Wolfenberg. She was more cheerful in tone and manner; and she seemed greatly pleased to find that she could now talk to him freely and openly, and that he had nothing for her but the most confident of assurances and forecasts.

"I can hardly believe you are Amélie's mother," said he, with some pretence of laughing at her lingering doubts. "Where did she get all her courage, her splendid audacity?"

"She is young," said the poor mother, wistfully; "and I am alone. If she were to take it into her head to live in Russia, what would become of me?"

"She won't live in Russia," said he, bluntly.

"She is mad about everything Russian."

"Why not?"

"You would think there was nothing like Russian music, Russian literature, Russian character; and what if she were suddenly to determine to go and live in the country?"

There were two women listening in silence to all this; and one of them was saying to herself—"Oh, yes, you are her mother; there is not the least doubt about the relationship. Here you are talking to your best and nearest friend about a great change in all your circumstances, affecting him quite as much as it affects you; but there is not a word about his plans, his future; it is only about your daughter you are concerned, and about yourself. There is a strong family likeness between two women who could *throw* over a man in that fashion, without a thought that was

not centred on themselves. And why is he not shocked by such a display of ingratitude? What is it blinds him? What infatuation possesses him that at one time his sole and absorbing interest in the world seems to be that girl's career as an artist; and then, when she abruptly abandons it, he defends her, he welcomes the change—welcomes anything that approves itself to her. And yet they say that unselfish devotion is no longer known in these days?"

It was at this juncture that Amélie Dumaresq herself chose to pay us a brief visit: she came swiftly and lightly along the deck; and there was a happy and affectionate radiance in her eyes as she slipped down beside her mother and put her arm round her waist.

"Matushka," she said, complainingly, "it is very hard: every one seems willing to hear me sing except the little mother. Won't you come down into the saloon, for five minutes? I am going to try the 'Cossack's Lullaby'; and it sounds so pretty in the Russian; and Paul says I pronounce very well—"

"Amélie!" Mrs. Dumaresq protested, with some petulance. "Why should any one sit in the saloon on a night like this?"

The girl laid her head against her mother's cheek and fondled the other cheek with her disengaged hand.

"Now don't be angry—don't be angry," she said, in coaxing tones. "So you would rather have the moonlight? Very well—very well—who can wonder? Matushka, was there ever such a marvellous voyage? There never was such a voyage before; there never will be such another; all the beautiful things in Europe crowded into it; and continuous splendid summer days and magical nights. Well, there," she said, as she released her arm and sprang gayly to her feet, "I will leave you to your silver seas. But mind you, Matushka, don't you sit up late—and mind you don't catch cold."

And away she went again, with light and joyous steps, along the intervening space of moonlit deck. Wolfenberg's eyes followed her.

"She seems simply palpitating with happiness," he said. "And that is as it should be."

## CHAPTER XIX

### OVER A VOLCANO

NEXT morning found us opposite the yellow-brown plains of Troy and the odd little windmills; on our right was Tenedos, with its small red town and more windmills; around us, the blue Ægean. It was a day that opened under fair auspices: it ended—in sadder fashion.

What struck us most, as we were sailing away down to Cape Baba and the shores of Mitylene, was the undaunted cheerfulness maintained by Wolfenberg, in view of all these recent disclosures. You would have thought that everything had turned out just as he had planned and desired. He made open profession of acquaintanceship with Hitrovo, walking up and down with him, chatting and laughing; and Amélie Dumaresq seemed pleased to see those two together. When he talked to Mrs. Dumaresq, he had nothing but the most confident assurances about the young Russian, and praise of his appearance, his manner, his serenity of temper, his air of good breeding. All was going well and as it should be—because of Amélie's obvious happiness.

"And never a thought about himself!" said Lady Cameron, almost bitterly, to her usual confidante. Then she went on: "But I have been thinking about him. And I am quite of your opinion: we ought not to let a man like that, simply through his own unselfishness, be thrown aside in any such cold-blooded fashion. What does he mean to do when he returns to London? Do you think he would care to pay a visit to Inverfask? Ewen is almost sure to meet us at Malta; and he would be delighted with such a companion; Mr. Wolfenberg could go right on with us. And fancy what a revelation the West Highlands would be to him—the mysterious loneliness of them, the remoteness, and wildness. You know, Missis, I've had some little experience of the West Highlands now; and in settled fine weather, when we *do happen* to get such a thing, they come away down and down,

and down and down, until they might be Lake George, or Windermere, or Killarney, or anything; then of a sudden the raging Atlantic gales are upon us, and the whole place is whirled clean away out of the reach of the ordinary landscape-painter. But if a man like Wolfenberg were to see the mists, and the fearful gloom, and the blazes of light and color—"

"Well, here he is coming along, Peggy," observed her companion. "Why don't you ask him at once?"

Amélie Dumaresq was with him: she had intercepted him, for some reason or another.

"Oh, Mr. Wolfenberg," said Lady Cameron, a little timidly, as those two drew nigh, "we have just been talking about the West Highlands—and—and artists all say that October is the finest month for color—and I was wondering whether you could be persuaded to come and stay with us at Inverfask for a while—just as long as you found the neighborhood interesting. I expect my husband to join the ship at Malta; and we might all go on together, when we reach England, if that suited your arrangements. I don't know whether you have anything to detain you in London—"

Here she stopped. She could see that he was looking embarrassed; and indeed there was some touch of color in the pale and refined face as he answered her implied question.

"No, I have made no very definite plans," he said, evasively. Then he turned to his companion, "There are your drawings, Amélie—the exhibition: we must not abandon that. At least," he continued, with a certain diffidence, "I assumed that you still meant to carry out that idea. It would be a pity to abandon it. I should like you to come before the English public—I know how you would be received—I feel sure of it."

Curiously enough, before replying she glanced quickly across the ship's deck towards Paul Hitrovo, who was at the opposite rail, rolling a cigarette.

"I—I am not sure," she said, with downcast eyes. "I think I had forgotten about it. And perhaps—perhaps, after all, it would be better to leave that aside. I am not so anxious for the opinion of the public. It was your opinion, Ernest, and your constant backing me up, that made me dream about being an artist. And now—well—there are other things—" But here she broke away from all this pretty confusion, and proceeded to

speak in the frank, downright impetuous fashion that was a good deal more natural to her. "Ernest, what is the use of your talking about my wretched trash! If there is to be an exhibition at all, let it be, as I have insisted again and again, an exhibition of your collected works. That would be something—something noble and fine!—and whether you held it in London or New York, I think I should be there to see, no matter where I might have to come from! When you can bring together a series of great, imaginative works like those that have won you your fame, what is the use of coming to me for my wretched little scraps and sketches from the Atelier Didron? No, no, Ernest; put that aside, at least in the meantime; and think of something more important—that is, if you are capable of thinking about anything connected with yourself for a single moment."

And with that she went away, for her mother had twice called her. Wolfenberg followed her with his large, grey, thoughtful eyes.

"I wonder if she means wholly to abandon her art—to put it altogether aside—and forever," he said, in profound meditation. "Perhaps she does not know the sacrifice she is making. Yet to have advanced so far—to have shown such power—"

He was silent. And for a second or two the friends who were with him rather held back from intrusion, knowing in what direction his thoughts were bent; but, presently, to divert his mind from that too sombre prospect, Peggy returned to her proposal that he should, on reaching England, go on with herself and her husband to Inverfask. It was a kindly and considerate suggestion on her part; but then we knew from of old that she was capable of such things.

"Why," she said to him, "you, of all people in the world, are just the one to understand thoroughly the mysterious charm and fascination of those remote islands. Shall I tell you how I got some small inkling of it myself—though I went there as a stranger? We have a choir at Inverfask; and they practise in the Volunteers' Drill-Hall—a big, empty, wooden place; and one night my husband and I walked along to hear them. It was very dark; and we were cautious about the steps; and just as we got to the door, which was a little bit open, Ewen said to me 'Stop! —listen!—they are going to sing the Lament of Mac Crimmon.' So we stood there in the dusk; and the first thing we heard was

the strangest sound—the voices of all the choir in a low, modulated murmur—it was like the wailing of wind round the shore. You seemed to be looking at a desolate island—with a grey sea all around it—and driving clouds and rain. I cannot tell you how inexpressibly sad and mournful it was; but all at once there was a woman's voice—high and clear—it was like some piteous cry of anguish—but softened by its being distant—away above the moaning of the wind and the sea. Indeed, the others had stopped now—there was but the one voice—in the silence you could hear distinctly:

*The mists are dark on Coolin's hill;*
*The banshee's cry is far and shrill;*
*Blue eyes may weep, fond hearts may yearn—*
*Mac Crimmon shall no more return.*

And then all the other voices—the men's voices a deep bass—rose in refrain—so plaintive and sad—and yet so lofty and solemn—well, I know I was trembling from head to foot—

*No more, no more, no more, Mac Crimmon!*
*No more, no more, no more, Mac Crimmon!*

—that was the refrain—and it is impossible to describe the solemnity of it, and the mournfulness, and the way it sounded remote, as if it was all taking place among mists and grey seas, and by lonely shores. Ewen wanted me to go in. I could not. I stood at the partly-opened door. And then they sang 'The Braes of Glen Braon.' Oh, that was worse!" said Peggy, with something between a sob and a laugh. "That was worse. If you want to have your heart broken right away, get a Highland choir to sing 'The Braes of Glen Braon'!"

He had been following every word with rapt attention: we could see by his eyes how his imagination had been aroused.

"Yes," he said, "I should like to visit those islands—and I can imagine the music being a true key-note." Then his interest seemed to fall away. "But I hardly know yet what I may do. I have been absent a long time from my own country. Perhaps I should go back there—one owes a little gratitude to one's native soil."

"Amélie will be disappointed," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, regarding him, "if you do not have that exhibition of your pictures in England."

"Amélie?" said he. But he would speak no word that could be construed into any reflection upon her. "Oh, Amélie will have plenty of interests," he said; "why should she remember or care about a trifle like that?"

And at lunch-time, again, he maintained that attitude of resolute optimism—to cheer and reassure those very friends of his who were forsaking him; and now he no longer showed any hesitation about referring to Paul Hitrovo in their common talk.

"What do you say, Amélie," he asked, with grave irony, "of a young man whose chief ambition is to become a member of the Austro-Hungarian Jockey Club?"

She laughed.

"What do I say? Well, I say—why not? Has he not got as good a name as any of them? Very fine names, no doubt—grand names — Festetics — Esterhazy—Auersberg—Montenuovo—Batthyani: but which of them is a better name than his own?" she demanded, proudly.

"To my mind," Wolfenberg said, turning to another subject that seemed to suggest itself naturally enough, "Vienna is by far and away the most delightful city in Europe—I mean, to live in. Its appearance is so bright and cheerful—the streets spacious—the foliage in the public parks beautiful—the people gay, light-spirited, handsome—it is always Carnival-time in Vienna. It is true it has not got the art-treasures of Florence; but then it has not got the poisonous drainage of Florence. It has not got the sea-view of Naples; but then it has not got the squalor and beggary of Naples. It has not got the mysterious enchantment of Venice; but then it has not got the smells of Venice. No: to live in—for pleasant cheerfulness—for the enjoyment of life—for plenty of amusement, among well-bred, and handsome, and light-hearted people—I pronounce for Vienna!"

The mother had overheard all this with ever-increasing alarm.

"Amélie," said she, "do you think of living in Vienna?"

The girl laughed again, and seemed to throw away the future from her by a little gesture of her finger-tips.

"Who knows, matushka?" she said lightly. "These may be all châteaux en Espagne. But I wish you would make this wicked Ernest think more seriously about his exhibition in London: that is of much more importance."

After luncheon he disappeared, as also did young Verrinder

and the timid and Juno-eyed damsel; so that we guessed the three of them were away after that mystic picture of the dawn that was partly to hide and partly to reveal a portrait. When Wolfenberg came on deck again, some two hours thereafter, it chanced that Lady Cameron was playing cribbage with the Major; and he seized this opportune moment to approach Mrs. Three-penny-bit.

"You can keep a secret well," he said, in a guarded voice, and with smiling eyes.

"In what way?" responded Mrs. Innocence.

"I have had a little confession made to me this afternoon," he went on. "Well, of course I had guessed—more than guessed. If I had not been pretty sure, do you think I should have undertaken this sketch for them—"

"Oh, the sketch?—has Julian Verrinder said anything to you?" the small woman asked, in a vague kind of way.

"You need not be afraid: he told me you knew," Wolfenberg answered, with some little amusement over her hesitation. And then he proceeded with a kind of grave sympathy: "Indeed it has been very attractive to me—the occasional hour along there in the fore-saloon, with this pretty spectacle before my eyes all the time. Of course I knew; it was easy to guess; and there were no onlookers down there to disturb them. It was the world all grown young again—his care of her and constant solicitude; her timid deference towards him; and both of them thinking they were most cleverly concealing their tremendous secret. Well, it was gratitude opened the young man's lips; it appears he thinks there is some kind of likeness; and he confided in me—"

"But why should the tremendous secret be confided first to one, and then to another, and not to the very person who has most right to know?" demanded this small creature, more in amazement than in anger. "Why does not that silly child go at once and tell her sister?"

"Well, there is some reason, too," he said, "as I gather from certain hints. She is very much afraid of being cross-examined as to how they met, and as to her position generally—she not yet knowing any one of his relatives, and so forth—indeed, I don't quite understand all their distresses and fears and complications; but I am informed that everything is to be put right at Malta."

"Oh, everything is to be put straight at Malta?" the other said, graciously. "And how is Malta going to make the difference?"

"Must I reveal all their plans and schemes?" he said, his raised eyebrows smiling an inquiry. But he continued, with much good-nature: he himself seemed interested in this screened and veiled little idyl. "Perhaps I cannot be quite positive about all the details of the plotting and scheming—for there was a good deal of shyness and embarrassment—but at least I know certain features of it. For example, when we were first at Constantinople, Miss Emily managed to get her photograph taken—"

"When she was ashore with Miss Penguin!"

"She managed it, anyhow: it was at Verrinder's urgent entreaty. Then when we came back from the Crimea, they found copies ready; and these were at once dispatched—to Verrinder's mother, and his sister, and his uncle. Now do you see where Malta comes in?"

"No, I don't," she answered, honestly.

"Why, by the time we get to Malta, letters from England will have arrived there, in answer to those sent from Constantinople; and the uncle, and the mother, and the sister have all been implored to write prettily to the young lady who is about to enter their family. The photographs will have propitiated them—the big, soft eyes, the winning mouth, the ingenuous and innocent and appealing expression. No doubt his relatives over there know well enough that the young man is his own master, and that they may just as well approve his choice; still, the photographs are to bespeak favor; and very nice letters are sure to come to Malta; and then Miss Emily, when she goes to tell her sister, will have documents in her hand to show that this is no hole-and-corner engagement, that everything is openly arranged and approved of, and that the Verrinder family are ready to receive her with open arms. What do you think?—a skilful little design, is it not?"

"It is a piece of childish absurdity!" she said, sharply. "The girl ought to have gone straight to her sister, and told her, the moment she came on board."

But he, in his large toleration, took a more lenient view. The sight of these two young lovers together had pleased and interested him; their confiding to him their dark plans and stratagems

was a still further claim; indeed so charmed was he with the society of those two young romancists that what was originally meant to be a sketch promised to become a much more elaborate affair before he had finished with it and them. Moreover he had his own secret; for neither of them knew that this drawing was to be a wedding-present.

But that night something happened that drove all those pretty trifles out of his head. After dinner he did not come on deck with us, as was his wont; nor did he remain in the Saloon with the Dumaresqs (there was to be some music); instead, he disappeared in the direction of the smoking-room, along with Paul Hitrovo. We thought little of it at the time. He had begun to make open show of his amicable relations with the young Russian; he seemed to wish everybody to understand that Amélie's fiancé must needs be his friend. We went on deck, well content, to seek out our accustomed haunt. It was a beautiful night—a clear moon shining on a quiet sea: an admirable night for getting away down through the sprinkled islands of the Archipelago.

It was late when he joined us; and instantly we saw that something had occurred; his face was curiously disturbed and anxious.

"I am glad you have not gone below," he said—and he spoke in a low voice, though there was no one near. "I must have counsel—I don't know what to do. And—perhaps I exaggerate: wherever Amélie is concerned, I may be stupidly nervous; and a little common-sense may put everything right." He paused for a second. "Yes, it may be merely some morbid fancy—but it seems as if I had just stepped into a new-made grave."

His face looked strange in the moonlight. Then he appeared to make an effort to throw aside some feeling that was oppressing him.

"No, I must not, and will not believe it," he said, with his naturally firm lips tightening somewhat. "I am easily disquieted where Amélie is concerned; and that is a weakness that must be put aside; one might take example from herself—her splendid nerve and audacious courage. The fact is, I have just been having a long chat with Hitrovo—the first intimate conversation we have had; and he has been very frank. There it is, you see—his frankness—disturbing at the moment, but really hopeful, for if

there were anything really evil about him there would be no concealment; he would be more specious: don't you think so?"

He was addressing himself more particularly to the elder of the two women; but what could she say in answer to this incoherent appeal? It was clear enough that this man was being torn in two different directions: he had made some discovery that had alarmed him—and yet he was determined to see nothing of any moment in it.

"At the same time," he continued, as if in partial justification of himself, "it is a little startling when a young man begins to tell you, quite calmly and coolly what he means to do with the fortune he counts on coming to him with his marriage. And that is what Hitrovo did—oh, yes—quite coolly and frankly!—no beating about the bush whatever. Race-horses he seems to have set his mind on chiefly—owning the horses—keeping up some kind of racing establishment, I suppose. He confessed to me that he had no money of his own—had run through it; and that it was absolutely necessary, if he married at all, that he should marry a woman with plenty of money. Then he began to ask me the extent of Amélie's fortune; he appeared to assume that he would have entire control of it; indeed, he even suggested that he might have to impose conditions—as if he were being bought, and wanted the highest possible price for himself!"

But here he stopped; for his voice was beginning to vibrate with indignation. When he resumed, it was in quite a different key.

"After all," he said, "it may be only natural. I think the English and Americans look on marriage differently from the nations of continental Europe. On the Continent marriage is a provision and a settlement; and why should not a young man frankly tell you he has no money of his own; and why should not he look forward to an abundance of wealth that will benefit his wife as well as himself? As I say, it was merely that at first his honesty was a little startling; yet there is little need to protest against honesty—it is too uncommon. You see," he proceeded, with a sort of affectation of careless equanimity, "if I did really think he was nothing but a fortune-hunter, I should be bound to go and warn Mrs. Dumaresq, and Amélie too. Don't you agree with me? *I am* their friend. They are women, alone, with no adviser to

guide them. Wouldn't you say, now, that if I thought there was serious danger—if I thought Hitrovo's only notion in marrying Amélie was to get hold of her money to squander it on the Turf —I ought to go and warn her mother and herself?"

This was the counsel he had come for, evidently; but the wise, small creature whom he addressed knew better than to intervene at such a moment. The ways were all dark as yet. She was silent.

"Yes, if it were really so," he said, presently, with something more of sincerity, and even with some trace of agitation, in his voice, "it would be terrible. If it were so, and if Amélie were to make the discovery, it would kill her. She is so passionately proud. And her heart is just filled with this new happiness; she says she knows what it is to live now; she says she is ready to part with all other illusions—but not with this one. And that also is to be considered: why should I seek to rob her of this great and absorbing happiness, even if I knew, or suspected, him to be unworthy of her?—"

She dared not answer. These questions that he asked her, with their infinite and unsearchable possibilities, appalled her. And as for him, he seemed distracted—fighting against himself, and determined to destroy his own dark imaginings and fears.

"There is nothing so despicable as an intermeddler and busybody," he said, with a sudden vehemence of angry self-contempt. "And he is almost certainly misinformed—necessarily so—he is an outsider. And he almost invariably works mischief. How is it possible that I should know more about Hitrovo than Amélie does—she who has been studying him closely all this time? The idea of my taking information about Hitrovo to *her!* And the information would be wrong; it would be founded on a personal misapprehension of my own; it would be the result of misunderstanding, of false judgment. Why should he not ask about the extent of her fortune? It is but natural he should want to know. And why should I take it for granted that he would squander the money on the Turf? Ah, I see you understand how these fears of mine arise. I know why you are silent. You are saying to yourself that I am jealous; that I hate him for taking her away from association with me; that I attribute motives that are ungenerous; that I am prophesying evil because I feel injured. Well, *perhaps it is so*—I hope it is so—"

He was standing opposite her—his earnest eyes and questioning face bent down upon her. Somehow, with a kind of instinct, she reached up her hand to his hand, and took it, and pressed it for a moment: it was a trivial little action more significant than any words.

"No," she said, "that is not to be thought of. Not any one could think *that*. The affection you have shown towards her—so constant—so unselfish—I have never seen the like of. And now you are thinking of nothing but her. It is her welfare—her happiness—always. But, my dear friend, how can I answer you? You are hoping for the best: perhaps the best may come. Will you tell me this?—did he speak, apart from these mere money-matters, as if he really cared for her?"

"He spoke as if his sole concern was the amount of her fortune—and what he was going to do with it!" Wolfenberg exclaimed, with an involuntary return to that tone of indignation; but the next moment he had become dreadfully confused, and humble, and apologetic. "Naturally, naturally," he said. "Men don't talk of sacred and secret things in a corner of a smoking-room. Of course he cares for her, or why should he wish to marry her? He could marry well elsewhere; he has high connections; he could probably marry a bigger fortune than hers, if that were all he was seeking. No, no; why should we suppose anything of the kind? In a smoking-room—talking to one who was almost a stranger to him—of course he spoke merely of ordinary and practical things. He knew that I was more or less acquainted with their affairs; and he wanted information—what could be more reasonable? He was not going to talk about love-passages—to wear his heart on his sleeve—in a ship's-smoking-room! And when he spoke of the cost of living in Vienna, and the expense of giving entertainments, and keeping a few race-horses, why, that was only telling me something in return for what I had told him. Yes, I see I must have exaggerated it all to my own mind," he went on, with a kind of pathetic insistence. "I must have jumped to unwarranted conclusions, merely because he was so outspoken and straightforward. And then, if I were to go and alarm Mrs. Dumaresq unnecessarily, would not that be a monstrous piece of stupidity? As I say, I am foolishly nervous and anxious about Amélie and anything that might affect her; and I must exercise a little self-control; I must bring some

common-sense to bear; I must wait for to-morrow's clear daylight to dispel all these black dreams."

"That at least can do no harm," she said as she rose—and indeed it was time for all of us to get away below, to seek out our several berths.

As the two women paused for a second at the door of Peggy's cabin, there were few words spoken between them.

"Well, Missis, what do you think of that?"

"I know one thing, Peggy," said her friend, sadly enough. "In spite of all his brave optimism, there is a sick heart on board this ship this night."

Next morning we were amongst the most southerly of the shining Cyclades. A glance out of the port-hole told us we were nearing certain ruddy islands of a curious burnt and arid aspect: lofty cliffs and peaks of slag and tufa, with here and there shelves and crests of marble, and here and there masses of tumbled cinders. Not a blade of vegetation anywhere visible; while the only symptom of human life or occupation was a solitary fishing-boat, the orange-gold hull and sails of which, catching the early sunlight, sent glaring reflections down on the glassy blue mirror of the sea. Then the gradual lessening of the *Orotania's* speed was of itself a sufficient summons: we were in a manner called on deck, to see what was abroad.

We discovered that we were quietly stealing into the Gulf of Santorin—a circular, or almost circular, basin, formed by the enclosing crescent of Thera and the shorter coast-line of Therasia. But the strange thing to think of was that we were now steaming slowly across the crater of a volcano—a volcano not at all extinct, but capable, in its livelier moods, of throwing up an island or two from its unknown ocean depths. At the present moment there was little sign of disturbance either by water or land; the ruddy cliffs were still and silent; the azure plain around us showed hardly a ripple.

It was a striking scene, and beautiful in its way, but in no wise terrific or awe-inspiring; and when our friends began to appear, in little detached groups, a general air of animation and cheerfulness prevailed. Amélie Dumaresq, in especial, appeared to be merry and light-hearted on this pleasant morning; she had put her arm round her mother's waist; she was laughing and talking,

and looking up to Paul Hitrovo; Wolfenberg—more thoughtful of face—was also with them.

"Why doesn't the kettle boil?" we could hear her say, as she was looking at the still blue circumference of sea. "Or has the water put out the fires?"

There were other two women separated from that little knot of companions by but a few yards.

"Missis," said Peggy, in an undertone, "have you been considering what you were told last evening?"

"I lay awake a good part of the night," was the simple answer.

"And don't you think," continued Peggy, with significant eyes, "that there are certain people not very far away from us who are just over a volcano in more senses than one?"

"Poor Wolfenberg!" said her friend, absently: she did not seem to heed about the others.

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## CHAPTER XX

### UNDER-CURRENTS

And so once again we were on the wide waste of waters, yet not altogether out of sight of land, for in the north a few rocky islands, of a faint rose-grey, were visible, while in the south a pale film along the horizon spoke of the distant coast-line of Crete. But the truth is that we had for long grown so accustomed to the ever-constant features of that outer world—the cloudless skies, the spacious circle of blue-black, silver-glancing waves, and the blaze of white light away towards the sun—that it was only by accident one's attention strayed beyond the rail of the ship; in this floating home of ours there were sufficient interests to occupy us; and more especially at this moment were these interests become of serious, not to say tragic, import.

For to Wolfenberg the long hours of the night had brought no reassurance. As soon as our Orotanians had settled down to their ordinary duties or amusements, he took the first convenient opportunity of seeking out the small woman whose tact, and shrewd-

"WELL, MISSIS, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?"

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ness, and unfailing sympathy and kindliness he had learned to understand. And we could see by something in his face that he had no good news to report.

"Perhaps you think I was exaggerating when I spoke to you last evening," he said to her. "But it isn't so. There was even some concealment: I thought you might be induced to take a hopeful view. And now you ought to know the truth; for something terrible may be looming ahead—that even yet might be averted; and it is your experience, and judgment, and knowledge of a woman's nature that a man finds need of in such a crisis."

Her eyes were fixed on him; and as plainly as possible they said: "Well, tell me the story. But it is about you—it is about you yourself—that I am really concerned."

"I have been thinking it over during the night," he went on. "And the truth is I did not half describe to you the coolness with which Hitrovo talked. He quite seemed to take it for granted that it was to be made well worth his while to marry. And his ideas about the extent of Amélie's fortune were absolutely preposterous. No doubt the Dumaresqs are very well off; and Amélie is an only child; but he appeared to regard her as a great heiress; and his schemes about the administration of her property, when it came under his control, were grand indeed. Did I tell you about the race-horses? I know little about race-horses myself; but I should imagine that keeping up such an establishment as he spoke of would be a most expensive affair, to say nothing of the gambling and betting. The fact is, in estimating Amélie's probable fortune, he has been led astray by her diamonds. I can see that. He assumes that her money will be in proportion to her jewellery; and there he is entirely mistaken; for the bulk of those diamonds came to her as a special legacy from an aunt who died some years ago—"

"It is very extraordinary that a girl should carry about with her £4000 or £5000 worth of diamonds," said Mrs. Threepennybit, in a casual way.

"They are a plaything for her," said he, briefly — for when would he allow that Amélie Dumaresq was acting with any lack of discretion? "And they are safe enough while we are at sea; and then again, when we get into port, she hands them over to the Purser and his strong-box. But you can easily understand

how Hitrovo, seeing such a quantity of jewellery in the possession of a young, unmarried girl, would naturally imagine that her property was in proportion: hence the talk about race-horses—about the fine house in Vienna—and balls, and musical evenings, and private theatricals. If he is selling himself," added Wolfenberg, with unusual bitterness—"as he almost leaves you to infer—he is demanding a large price!"

Mrs. Threepenny-bit was silent and thoughtful for a moment or two.

"Young men sometimes talk with affected cynicism in such cases," she said. "But there are means by which you could find out whether he was making an honest confession or not. For instance, you could tell him how mistaken he was about the amount of Amélie's fortune. You would be justified in doing so; that would not be the interference of a busybody—which you seem to dread; for he himself has applied to you for information. That is one point. Another is, you can hint pretty plainly to him that her money will be strictly tied up and settled upon herself. Then hear what he has to say."

A quick flush sprang to his face; and he seemed to shrink back from that proposal, almost in alarm.

"Oh, I could not do that!" he said, hurriedly. "Why—why—that would look as if I wanted the engagement to be broken off!—whereas, it is quite the other way; there is nothing I would not do to have the marriage come about happily, when I see how her whole life seems bound up in it. No, no; no, no; I am all anxiety that everything should go on well, and safely, and happily; and surely it is wiser to have a little confidence—surely one ought to be on the sanguine side—to hope for the best."

It was clear that this man knew not what to think—that his mind was racked and torn asunder by the conflict between his desperate misgivings and his dogged optimism.

"Would it not be more reasonable," he continued, "to take up your other conjecture, so that I could go to him and say—'Come, now, admit that there was a good deal of affectation in your manner of speaking last night. You are not really going to marry in order to have plenty of money to squander in Vienna. You cannot be quite so calmly indifferent to Amélie herself—to her personal grace and charm, her striking and attractive individuality, her intellectual gifts. You don't honestly

consider that you are selling yourself for a mess of pottage. That is all *blague*—or rather the talk of the young man of the present day, who above all things detests and dreads being thought sentimental.' Wouldn't that be better?—wouldn't that be the more generous interpretation?—and mightn't it lead him to speak in a less openly cynical fashion?"

"Perhaps," she said, evasively.

"And you may be sure of this," he went on, "that he does not talk in that way to Amélie. She must see and know the other side. Look at her over there now: did you ever behold such a perfect embodiment of high spirits and radiant happiness? What is she after now?"

"Worrying people into giving promises for to-morrow night's concert," answered Mrs. Threepenny-bit, coldly. Indeed, she had of late shown herself somewhat impervious to Amélie Dumaresq's many fascinations—though ordinarily she was not hard of heart towards young women.

"I shall hope to see her as careless and merry as that always," said he, with a certain wistfulness. And then he came back to this subject that had caused him so much of perplexity and pain.

"There is one thing I must ask you," he said. "Supposing that you, or I, or anybody were to be personally convinced that Hitrovo was marrying Amélie wholly from mercenary motives, then would you consider it a point of honor that she should be told? Or don't you think, if you saw how all her hopes were centred upon this union, that you would rather be silent, and trust to everything coming right, and try to work to that end. You see, you might be altogether mistaken in your suspicions. It is easy to misjudge people: it is difficult to get at motives. But, above all, if you saw that her chances of happiness in life were irrevocably pledged, would you not rather rely upon things coming out right somehow, instead of going to her with the cruel truth. Remember what she is—"

"Yes, I know what you mean," responded his friend. "And I remember what you said last night about her passionate pride—that it would kill her if she were to discover that she had been deceived by an adventurer, that she had been sought after merely for her money. Well, I am not so sure that such a discovery would kill her. I think her pride would work another way. It would *make her furious*; it would make her a good deal more

anxious to kill him—that is, if she found out in time. And supposing he is the despicable creature you suggest—"

"Oh, but I did not suggest that!" he said, anxiously—and one almost seemed to fancy that his face grew a trifle pale. "No; I say it is impossible he can be blind to what Amélie is in herself; it is impossible he can be thinking only of her money. And your surmise is so much more reasonable—that he may be merely talking for effect. He would not confess it if it were really true!—he would conceal it—"

"Anyhow," said she, "let us imagine for a moment that it is really true. And if Amélie were to make the discovery in time—before marriage, I mean—would not the very pride you speak of enable her to throw him off without an apparent pang? It isn't as if she would be left desolate, and objectless, and friendless. Could she not resume that relationship with you that she used to be so enthusiastic about?—and take up her painting?—and become a great artist?—and do all the fine things she was set upon?"

He appeared for a moment bewildered.

"Resume all that?" he said, with the strangest look in his eyes. Then he seemed to put away from him that possibility as something too hopeless, as something forever done with. "No, no; it cannot be. The current of her life has set in another direction; and it cannot be stemmed or diverted now, without a catastrophe too frightful to contemplate. No, no; we have to make the best; we have to hope for the best—"

And at this very moment, when he was driven nigh to distraction by anxiety on her account, Amélie herself came over to us, gay, audacious, scornfully mocking, and light-hearted as a linnet. She certainly looked charming. The slight make-up she was in the habit of adding to her complexion for evening wear was now absent; there was a youthful freshness in the pale olive hue of her check; her lips were healthily red without any salve at all; and a perfectly reckless and childish merriment laughed in the dark, soft, audacious eyes.

"Why, you are the most persistently idle people!" she exclaimed. "I can bear down anybody's opposition except yours; you are too dreadfully stubborn. Why won't you help us? We have all sorts of offers that we want to refuse; and yet you won't *enable us*; you are mute, and obstinate, and clannish, and unso-

cial. And, mind you, I have heard—oh, yes, I have heard of ongoings elsewhere—plantation choruses—banjoes—and pretty late hours, too—or early, whichever you like to call them; but here you are all as mum as mice. Why, even that dear creature, Sappho, has come down from her lofty heights to assist us—and this time it is not a recitation merely—but a song: isn't it good of her?"

"To sing for you?" Lady Cameron interposed. "It is impossible! She told me she was struggling day and night with a Requiem for the ocean-grave of Phaon; and that she could get no peace, it was so difficult. You see, she wants to bring in something pointing to the murderer—the supposed murderer; and that may not be so easy. She was in great gloom about it: it is impossible she can have undertaken to sing!"

"She is going to sing nevertheless," said the young lady, confidently, "and she has given us the name of her song. She means to appeal to popular sentiment—she is resolved to captivate the crowd with simple and honest pathos—she is going to sing 'When other lips.'"

No one was inhuman enough to laugh; nay, a perfect and subdued gravity was maintained by every pair of eyes. But how could we help figuring in imagination the rather dowdy figure, and the dishevelled sandy hair, and the wail of hopeless passion telling of Sappho's own tragic past? And how could we help recalling young Alec Burke, who was erewhile in the Foreign Office, but whom the Foreign Office will see no more? *Cha till, cha till, cha till e tuille!* Maddened by merciless persecution, he took a consulship and fled to the Gold Coast: he knew she dared not follow him thither—or, at least, he would have long notice of her coming, and would have time to escape. Then he was heard of at Costa Rica—at San Salvador—at Bogota—at Nicaragua. Poor Alec!—a wanderer on the face of the earth—looking back towards England from time to time, but always with a shuddering fear. *An cogadh na sith cha till e tuille!*

During the better part of this day the ship was as full of strange noises as was Caliban's island—'Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not'—in preparation for the following night. And as we happened to be in the neighborhood, we thought we might as well look in and see how Ferdinand and Miranda *were getting* on, in the company of the arch-magician

weaving his spells. Yes, we found all three in the fore-saloon; our entrance did not seem to make any difference; the artist proceeded with his work, talking the while; and if he had two more auditors, what then? He did not seem to heed.

And yet no one could have understood Wolfenberg's present mood and attitude—his apparent equanimity—who had not observed the rare combination of faculties that his features expressed: the imagination and pensive wistfulness of his forehead and eyes along with the determined will and strength of the lower part of his face. No doubt he had made an appointment with these young folks; and here he was keeping it; and he was resolutely and definitely thrusting away from him his own pressing anxieties in order to entertain his sitter and hold her interested. His talk was chiefly a kind of monologue—sometimes whimsical, sometimes serious—that was interrupted now and again when he stepped back to judge of the progress of his work.

"I was just saying to these young people," he remarked to Mrs. Threepenny-bit, as she took a seat not far from him, "that the confidence of youth, the splendid audacity of youth, was a very fine kind of thing, but that occasionally it became almost shocking—especially in the way of rash statements. Take the young man who was in love with the lass of Richmond Hill. His assertion—'I'd crowns resign to call her mine'—was much too absolute and unqualified. If he had said 'I *think*, in certain circumstances, I might perhaps resign a crown or several crowns in order to call her mine,' that would have been more prudent. I am afraid, if he had been taken at his word, and if he had had the crown or crowns to resign, he might have been tempted to think twice—"

"It was only a figure of speech!" young Verrinder said, naturally defending his kith and kind.

"Yes," said Wolfenberg—still working away at the splendid throat and the dark hair under the mysterious veil. "Yes, a figure of speech. In fact, hyperbole. And hyperbole is the natural language of a young man, if only he would talk naturally. But he is afraid. He prefers sheltering himself behind an affectation of indifference—or, worse still, cynicism. Now cynicism is the most useless kind of a thing in the whole wide world. Cynicism never does anything. 'Ice makes no conflagration.' *Fanaticism* may work miracles; cynicism produces nothing. And

the reason why the human race gives so eager a welcome to any new prophet, or new faith, or new enthusiasm, is that through thousands and thousands of years men and women have grown so tired and disappointed with the commonplace routine of life, with its narrow interests, its monotonous experiences, its miserable perishing into nothingness, that when any one puts something higher and nobler before them, and calls on them to attain to it, then hope stirs in them again, their imagination is fired, another millennium appears in the future. The millennium never comes; but they have the joy of striving forward towards it; and I suppose something is added to human consciousness by each wave of human faith. And if you wish to make your mark on your own time and age— But perhaps, Mr. Julian, the rearing of pheasants is what you're looking forward to?" he said, with a laugh, as he turned aside to pick up his penknife.

"And why not the rearing of pheasants?" said the Baby (blushing furiously). "We can't all be prophets?—you wouldn't have a whole nation of prophets?"

"Quite right—I quite agree with you," he answered her, good-naturedly—indeed, he seemed rather pleased by this spirited little bit of protest. "I was only going to say that if you wish to impress yourself on your own time you must teach people that there is something finer, and more wonderful, and more desirable than the ordinary every-day existence they see around them; and you may do that if you have the heart and brain of a poet, or a painter, or a musician, for each has his own revelation to make. But—if you will allow me to have my sermon out—" he continued, looking over in a very kindly fashion towards this young lady, "there is another way, in a smaller sphere. We cannot all be authors and artists and musicians, any more than we could have the country filled with prophets and priests. But I will take a single human being, who is none of these things, but who has certain qualities of honor, and modesty, and unselfishness, and sweetness, and gentleness; and if, through the constant exercise of all these gifts and graces she can show to those around her what it is to possess a beautiful human soul, do you think she has exercised no influence on her day and generation? Surely she has; and perhaps with wider results than she knows."

It was Julian Verrinder's face that burned now—with pride and gratitude. The meaning of these few words was clear

enough; and they were spoken with such a simplicity and sincerity that (as Mrs. Threepenny-bit said thereafter, with tears in her eyes) they sounded to her like a benediction.

But Wolfenberg was in a very different frame of mind that evening—all this placid and kindly serenity gone from him, and himself become a prey to the most torturing of self-questionings and dark conjectures. As he did not keep the usual rendezvous after dinner, one of us was by and bye despatched to find him, and eventually he was discovered right away forward, quite by himself, pacing up and down the moonlight deck, his hands clasped behind him, the fingers clenched.

"No, no," he said, in answer to a suggestion that he might come away aft to our accustomed retreat; "why should I inflict my troubles upon you and your companions? You are away on a voyage of amusement and rest; why should you have other people's cares thrust on you?"

He hesitated for a moment: it was evident that all the same he wanted to speak—that he had something to communicate. Then he said, almost hurriedly,

"I am afraid I have wrought mischief—and irreparable mischief—and I don't know what to think of it yet. And it was none of my seeking either. I did not wish to interfere; I wanted rather to shut my eyes a little, and trust that everything would go on well. But he came to me—Hitrovo came to me—and reopened that subject—pressing for information, and yet with a carelessness that seemed to say 'Oh, don't imagine I am a fortune-hunter; I am not a fortune-hunter at all; only, before I marry, I must know that it is going to be worth my while.' And I confess I grew indignant. I am afraid I lost my temper. Why, the shamelessness of it all seemed an insult—to Amélie. It is quite true that nearly everybody had gone below to get ready for dinner, and there were few people on deck; but the captain had just come out of his cabin, and he was talking to Lady Cameron—I believe they could have overheard Hitrovo, if they had chosen to listen. Or perhaps I was nervously anxious that he should not be overheard; at all events, I had to ask him to come aside; and he appeared to take the whole situation so coolly— Well, I'm afraid I lost my temper, and said things I ought not to have said. I said that if this mercenary talk of his was all a pretence, it was a *poor* kind of affectation. Then I told him plainly that he

seemed entirely to overestimate the amount of Amélie's fortune; and not only so, but that it was perfectly certain her uncle, the chief trustee, would take care it was kept entirely within her own control. There I was wrong. I had no right to say that. When he asked me to give him some idea as to what property there would be, perhaps I was entitled to tell him that it would certainly be a great deal smaller than he seemed to expect; for that I knew; that was within my own knowledge. But I had no right to speak of the disposal of her fortune—"

"Surely you said nothing that was not perfectly obvious to anybody possessed of common-sense! He must have known that the money would be settled on herself. Well, how did he take the information—if it was information?"

"Oh, he hum'd and ha'd—and twisted a deck-chair about—rather like a spoilt child. And then he said a few words—coolly and carelessly—as if the whole affair were of very little moment to him; and then he went away. I cannot make him out at all."

"But don't you think that plain speaking of yours will have done him good—will have made him a little bit ashamed?"

"I should not have done it—I should not have done it," he said, almost to himself—and his face seemed careworn in this wan light. "The risks are too serious. The consequences of a false step now—of mistaken interference—might be too dreadful to think of. What I know is," he continued, presently, "that the little I have made by my painting is not much of a fortune, but if it were ten times as great, I would gladly take it to him, every cent, and say, 'Let this go towards your fine entertainments in Vienna; but don't touch Amélie's money; and don't let her think that money had anything to do with her marriage.'"

"It isn't the first time a woman has thrown over a good friend for a bad husband."

"You must not think of such a thing!" he exclaimed, in great agitation. "There cannot be anything of the kind in this case—not at all! I tell you I exaggerate trifles where she is concerned; you must not mind half what I say; rather look at her—look at her splendid courage and nerve—do you think she is not capable of seeing clearly enough? Oh, you will see that everything will go right!" he continued, with a sort of doggedness. "Why, if you only think of it, that very frankness of his, though it may *startle you at the time*, is a good deal wholesomer than conceal-

ment. If he were marrying merely for money, he would conceal it—of course he would! And do you think Amélie does not know and understand what he is?—and she has faith in him, or she would not intrust her life to him."

He had forced himself into something of cheerfulness; the haunted look had in a measure left his face; and in the end he was persuaded to come aft to those friends who were awaiting him. But the two women scrupulously forbore from making any reference to Amélie Dumaresq; and he also maintained silence. The talk was about quite indifferent matters; sometimes there was a promenading of the deck, with a glance outward on the waves lapping in the moonlight; and sometimes there was a pause at the top of the companion-way, to listen to the rehearsal going on in the saloon.

That night a puff of wind came blowing down from the Adriatic, and the *Orotania* rolled a good bit; nothing to speak of, and yet almost a novel experience. Next morning, again, brought us something still more unexpected. A dark cloud crept stealthily into the brilliancy of the day; it increased in gloom; there were a few splinterings of pink flame; and then—the wonder of it!—actually rain! Yes, rain that came down in silver-grey sheets, hammering on the awnings, and hissing and seething on the decks; the strangest sound it was; it seemed to bring back far other times and places. And then it gradually ceased; the day widened and cleared; and around us once more we had the familiar features as of old—a sky of pale ethereal purple, a sea of blue almost aggressive in its strength, with diamond-gleams of sunlight from every crest and angle of the restless waves. Very lonely these waters seemed to be—yet not uncheerful.

During the afternoon we discovered that Mrs. Dumaresq had grown somewhat concerned about the part her daughter might possibly take in the proceedings of the evening.

"Has she told you?" the mother asked covertly of Mrs. Threepenny-bit. "She is so headstrong and daring; you never can guess what she is going to do; and indeed if it is something bizarre—something calculated to shock people, she likes that all the better—"

"But you don't expect her to unfurl the Russian flag or do anything of that kind?" the other said, smiling. "We are no *longer in* a Russian port. No, no, Mrs. Dumaresq, do not be

afraid; Amélie says she has performed her share in beating up recruits; she means to remain with us among the audience; she has no mischief in her mind, you may depend on it."

"But she does things so unexpectedly," the mother rejoined, with doubt lingering in her voice. "And she is so absolutely defiant of public opinion. . . . She is going to sit with us at our usual table?"

"So she says. It seems the chief difficulty has been that there were really too many volunteers. Apparently shyness has worn off. All kinds of undiscovered musicians have been coming forward to get a place in the programme. And I doubt whether Amélie will be called upon to do anything at all."

"I am glad of that—I am glad of that!" she murmured, with a sigh of relief. "It is so dreadful to have a young girl talked about—and Amélie is so ungovernable."

A little later on, as certain of us were standing talking together, Amélie Dumaresq came along, and said in her frank, impetuous way,

"I wish one of you would do me a favor."

"Yes?"

"That is a very pretty custom they have at some of the tables of asking a friend from another table to dine with them. We never have any visitors at our table—except at lunch-time. Now will you ask Mr. Hitrovo to dine with us to-night? Mamma is so timid about upsetting arrangements; but how can there be any difficulty?"

Well, there was no difficulty; for we got the Baby to go and sit next Miss Penguin; and as Julian Verrinder had his place at that table, she was very well content; while the young Russian came and took her vacant seat. We noticed nothing particular about his manner; in truth he was not in the habit of asserting himself much in any way. For one thing he certainly paid no special attention to the young lady to whom we understood he was engaged; he talked mostly, and in an indolent kind of fashion to Mrs. Threepenny-bit—about driving and what not. But at a certain point during the dinner, Amélie, with her fingers on the stem of her wine-glass, said,

"Ernest, don't you think we ought to wish our guest *bon voyage?*"

Wolfenberg looked startled.

"Oh, don't you know?" she continued, lightly. "He thinks it very likely he may have news to-morrow at Malta that may call him away from the ship—there is a line of steamers from Malta to Marseilles—and that is how he thinks of going. Well, if it must be, it must."

She turned to Hitrovo, and regarded him with smiling eyes.

"*Au revoir*, then, if it must be—and *bon voyage!*"—and therewith she raised her glass, and sipped a little of the wine, still with her eyes fixed pleasantly on his.

But Wolfenberg sate silent and quite pale, not daring to speak. He even forgot the formal raising of his glass. He seemed at once astounded and dismayed—and yet fearful of betraying himself by word or sign.

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## CHAPTER XXI

### "DA SVIDANIA!"

EARLY morning; and a glance through one of the ports reveals an old familiar picture—the great yellow bulk of Fort St. Elmo towering high into the blue. Then on deck; and we find ourselves slowly steaming into Malta harbor. Throughout one small circle of our passengers it is to be suspected that some little excitement prevails—subdued and reticent: it is felt that this may be a day of change and circumstance for more than one of our companions.

And hardly has the roar of anchor and anchor-chain died away when the *Orotania* mail-bag arrives; and instantly a nebulous crowd, good-humored, talkative, obliging, has clustered round the third officer, who generally presides at the distribution. But Lady Cameron is not among these idly-gossiping folk. What interest has she in any correspondence? She is standing by the rail, quite alone; while her eyes are intently scanning the various gayly-colored craft that are now making swiftly out from the mole, across the clear-shining water. For now the young grass-widow is about to be transformed into a lawful wife; she will take her proper place on board; perhaps she is even looking forward to

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giving herself airs when Cameron of Inverfask comes among us. As for Inverfask, there are no airs about *him;* but it is the business of a wife to magnify her husband's exploits and commanding qualities.

Meanwhile, as this deciphering and calling out of name after name was going on, one ventured to steal a look at the Baby. She had not joined that small crowd; she was modestly remaining a little way apart; yet it was easy to see that she was listening with all her ears.

"Do you expect any letters?" Mrs. Threepenny-bit said to her, in her kindly fashion.

"Oh, no," the Juno-eyed damsel made answer, hurriedly—and self-conscious color sprang to her face. "I don't expect any letter—no—not for myself." And then in her embarrassment she seemed to consider it necessary to apologize for her being there. "But—but there might be one for my sister, you know."

Suddenly those large, gentle, shy eyes looked startled.

"Mr. Julian Verrinder!" the third officer had sung out.

Then we discovered that Julian Verrinder was right in the middle of that loosely-scattered assemblage.

"Oh, here's another for you, Mr. Verrinder," the third officer went on. "And still another."

The Baby's face was a study—as far as one dared to observe. The intense listening—the absorbed suspense—had fled; relief, gladness, gratitude shone there, despite all her efforts to maintain an outward show of impassivity; and presently we saw her quietly withdraw from the outskirts of the crowd and wander along to the wheel-box, which was as much as to say to any one concerned: "When you have read those letters, you will find me here. And if you want me to look at them, could not I smuggle them into my pocket and carry them downstairs to my cabin?" As a matter of fact, Julian Verrinder, after a discreet second or two, did sneak off in the direction of that quiet corner. On his way he affected to show a profound interest in the brightly-painted boats that were now swarming along the vessel's side.

"Lady Cameron!" the third officer called out.

Then he looked round: there was no Lady Cameron.

"I will take it to her!" said the Major, delighted to have the chance of doing her this service; and away he went with the letter.

Almost immediately thereafter Peggy came over to us—vexation and disappointment only too visible in her face.

"Isn't it provoking!" she exclaimed. "This is from Ewen. He is detained in Rangoon another fortnight—perhaps three weeks. Did you ever know anything more vexatious? Missis, I want to swear. How much will you allow me? Or shall I get the Major to do it for me?"

"The Major covers quite enough ground on his own account," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, severely.

"And I shall have to go by myself all the way home to Inverfask!" continued our injured Peggy. Then sudden revolt appeared. "No, I will not, then! I will remain in London. I am coming to you, if you will have me; and I think we will just about make things hum? It's too bad! Why, I looked forward to his taking us ashore both here and at Gibraltar, and getting us all kinds of privileges—" But here she quite altered her tone and grew grave. "Missis," said she in an undertone, "I had forgotten about Wolfenberg. You know—the invitation. And I had hoped he would go right on with us to Inverfask. What am I to do?"

"You can easily explain to him," said her friend. "And if Wolfenberg does not go to Inverfask till later on, then I must take care that we see as much as possible of him while he remains in London. Ship-acquaintances are easily allowed to drift; but there are some that are too valuable; and besides there may be circumstances that call upon you—" She did not complete the sentence; for at this point the Major returned with another letter —which also was from Ewen Cameron for his wife.

But the strangest circumstance connected with this distribution of the mail was that Paul Hitrovo, whose leaving the ship, or not leaving the ship, was understood to depend on the news he should receive at Malta, did not put in an appearance until the last of the letters and newspapers had been delivered. It was then that he chanced to come along, accompanied by Mrs. Dumaresq and her daughter; and all three of them seemed to be in a highly cheerful mood. Perhaps he had heard through some other source that his departure had been rendered unnecessary?

"Just think of this man," cried Amélie, coming forward to us in her gay fashion, "who has never heard of his great namesake —the Chevalier Paul—who was born in the roadstead of Mar-

-seilles—and fought his way to be vice-admiral and all sorts of things. Why, it was in this very place that his adventures began: don't you know the ballad?—

*'À Malte, sur un brigantin,*
*Il met son sac un beau matin*
*Et rondement fait son chemin,*
*À l'abordage.*
*Le capitaine ayant péri,*
*Paul est nommé chef tout d'un cri*
*Par l'équipage.*
*A-t-on jamais vu plus charmant*
*Avancement?*
*Écoutez son histoire,*
*Mes vieux, elle est à notre gloire!*
*Mes vieux, elle est à notre gloire!'*"

She waved her arm triumphantly—her eyes laughing the while.

"Amélie," said the ever-anxious mother, in an undertone, "not so loud!"

And it was at this moment, when Hitrovo happened to have turned aside to speak to some one, that Wolfenberg drew near. He had been amongst those people who were surrounding the third officer; or at least he had been looking on. And now, as he approached Amélie Dumaresq, there was something curiously furtive, timid, apprehensive in his expression.

"Amélie," he said, with a kind of nervous watching of her face, "you told me last night that Mr. Hitrovo might have to leave for Marseilles to-day—if he got certain news, that is. Well, I suppose that is all abandoned now; for there was no letter for him; he cannot have got any news—"

"Oh, but he was not expecting any letter!" she said, interrupting him blithely. "Not at all. He may telegraph when we get ashore; but in any case he thinks it will be necessary for him to leave the ship here, and take the first steamer for Marseilles—"

"He is really going?" said Wolfenberg, quickly.

"Oh, yes," she made answer, in the same light-hearted fashion. "But it will be a race between us. He ought to reach England just about as soon as we shall, or even sooner—"

"He is coming on to England at once, then?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" she said. "He does not expect there will be much to detain him; and overland travelling is so expeditious; I should not be at all surprised if he won in the neck-and-neck race

to London. By the way, we shall have him again to dinner to-night; at least, I hope so—we shall see as soon as we land; and in that case, Ernest, if you want to make a pretty little speech about our departing guest—?"

He did not respond to that suggestion; but he seemed greatly relieved.

"Oh, he is coming on to London at once?" he repeated.

"Ernest," said she, laughing, "is it gloves or money you are after? Is it a bet? Very well. I will bet you ten pairs of gloves, twenty pairs, thirty pairs, if you like, that when we arrive at Tilbury, Monsieur Paul d'Hitrovo will be standing on the pier there to receive us. That is my offer. I am not greedy. I do not wish for odds. And yet as I know I am going to win, the odds are of importance, are they not? What do you say? It is a long journey—Marseilles—Vienna—Paris—London—"

"Oh, that is the arrangement, then, that he is to meet you at Tilbury?" he said, with something of a brighter look.

"If he gets to England in time, of course?" she put in.

"Naturally, naturally. It will be quite pleasant to have some one waiting to welcome you."

"But I am not to have the gloves!" she exclaimed, petulantly.

"When we all get to London together, Amélie," said he, in his grave and gentle way, "you shall have gloves, and gloves, and gloves—or anything else that you wish. But you must not expect me to back the ship in the great match of *Orotania* v. Hitrovo—because I should not wish to win."

She bestowed a glance of gratitude upon him.

"That is like you, Ernest. You always have something kind to say—when one least deserves it."

So far the day had opened well. The tenor of the communications that Julian Verrinder had received from his relations in England must have been wholly satisfactory; the shy, happy, self-conscious face of the Baby was sufficient evidence; while Wolfenberg—in a much more serious matter—seemed to have been half convinced by Amélie Dumaresq's audacious confidence that there was not much occasion for alarm as regarded Hitrovo's sudden departure. Perhaps it was this fortunate state of affairs that sent Mrs. Threepenny-bit away ashore in very good spirits; at all events as soon as we had taken our places in the stern of the rowing-boat, she said, with an air of great satisfaction,

"Do you know, Peggy, I never land at Malta, I never come into this bay, and go up the winding street yonder without the most curious sensation that I have got home again. I cannot understand it at all. Perhaps it is the English money in the shops—perhaps it is the English flag over the Governor's Palace —perhaps it is the English sentry outside his wooden box: anyhow, I have the strangest feeling that I am amongst my own people, and safe, and at home—"

"You cannot say it is a very English-looking place," observed Peggy, regarding the blue-green water, the brilliant boats, the yellow quays, the terraced houses built on the face of the steep cliffs, the arid walls, with here and there a scrap of cactus or cypress, and, high above all, the great forts, massive and golden, against the deep azure of a cloudless sky.

"And I declare I just love Tommy Atkins," continued the smaller woman, in her enthusiasm of the moment, "when I meet the impudent wretch come swaggering along with his cap cocked on one side and his cane in his hand. Then the sentries up at the bastions—they are a little different because of their pith helmet—and yet it is so comforting to know that they are English —or Scotch, or Irish, as it may be; and you are horribly tempted to go and say, 'Look here, my lad, can't I take a message to Mary Ann, or Susan, or Jane? I should like to tell her that I've seen you—and that you're doing your small part in keeping the British Empire together?' Peggy, what's the punishment for talking to a sentry?"

"Decapitation," says Peggy, promptly.

"Oh, what do you know about anything!" her friend retorts, with impatience. "A pretty officer's wife you are—never to have landed at Malta!—"

"And I expected to land at Malta in a very different way," says Peggy, with a proud and injured look. "I made sure that Ewen would take us about. And at Gibraltar, too. Why, he coolly writes and says that the Black Watch, the 42nd Highlanders, are stationed at Gibraltar just now, and I am to call on So-and-so, and we are to be shown the galleries, and I don't know what else. But I sha'n't! I will not go ashore at Gibraltar—not for one single quarter of an hour."

"Peggy, none of your little tempers!" her companion said, reprovingly. "Do you suppose Colonel Cameron is remaining

in Rangoon of his own free-will? And of course you must go ashore at Gib., for it is even more extraordinary than Malta, in the sense of home it produces. Why, you seem to be conscious all the time that you are just round the corner from England—although about five days' sailing intervenes. Not land at Gib.?" —But here we were at the worn yellow steps of the quay, so the discussion ceased.

Now during the long and blazing and sweltering hours we were compelled to remain ashore (for the *Orotania* was coaling) we were continually running against one or other of our shipmates—mostly in the Strada Reale, where the women-folk were industriously idle in purchasing lace, and silver, and trinkets for friends at home. In this manner we encountered all the current gossip —how the Dumaresqs had driven away out to the Catacombs—how the Major was going to give a luncheon-party at the Union Club—and the like; but the oddest thing was that everybody seemed already to have become aware of Hitrovo's approaching departure, while many and contradictory were the reasons suggested for that unexpected step. The Major's solution of the problem was brief and to the point.

"Plain as a pikestaff!" he said to Lady Cameron, when we chanced to meet him. "Vienna? Bosh! Who wants to land at Marseilles in order to get to Vienna? If he had wanted to go to Vienna, he would have left the ship at Constantinople. But Marseilles—I know what Marseilles means—Marseilles—Nice —Monte Carlo: that's the line he'll take. Our sixpenny points in the afternoon were not good enough for him—though he would watch the cards with the eye of a gambler—"

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense, Major!" Lady Cameron protested. "You are all prejudiced against him—I mean, all you gentlemen —because of his good looks. There's nothing of the gambler in his appearance. And if he refused to join in your game, isn't that all the more to his credit?"

"You mark my words," insisted the Major. "I know the line of travel he'll take: a bee-line: straight for *rouge-et-noir*. Sixpenny whist is not good enough; we must have the grand game; therefore Marseilles—Nice—Monte Carlo. Plain as a pikestaff!"

"Now, Major, answer me this," said Lady Cameron, with the greatest good-humor. "Have you seen him touch a single card all through this voyage?"

"No, I have not—I should have thought none the worse of him if he had—"

"Have you seen him gamble to the extent of a single franc?" she said.

"No, I have not—"

"And don't you perceive," she went on relentlessly, "that what you say against him can only be the wildest surmise? It is the kind of story that springs up on board ship—without any foundation whatever. You have absolutely nothing to bring against him: so you must needs suspect him of being a gambler! Is it fair?"

"Marseilles—Nice—Monte Carlo," said the Major, doggedly, as he shifted half an inch higher the box of cigars he was carrying under his arm. Nor, while he remained with us, could he be argued out of that conviction. He knew whither that young man was bound.

We lunched at a hotel—in a large, cool-shadowed apartment with green casements at the windows; and it was only now we remembered that one familiar face was missing from those casual encounters in the Valetta streets.

"Has no one seen Sappho?"—it was Mrs. Threepenny-bit who asked the question.

"She is remaining on board," answered Peggy.

"With the ship coaling!"

"She means to shut herself up in her cabin."

"She will be suffocated!"

"I don't suppose she'd mind," continued the sympathetic Peggy. "She has been quite heart-broken ever since the disappearance of Phaon; and nothing will set her right now until she has had it out with the Major—in scathing verse. Yes, there is something preparing for him that he little dreams of! And I must say I consider you people have been very cruel about Sappho. You never did like Phaon, to begin with—"

"I thought he was a disgusting little beast," observed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, calmly. "I would have given the butcher half-a-crown any day to chop its head off."

"Oh, just listen to her!" said Peggy, in awe-stricken tones. "No wonder the philosophers say that the British have inherited the bloodthirstiness of the Romans, and that it breaks out from time to time, both in individuals and in masses. Well, Sappho

has one friend on board; one who tries to understand her and sympathize with her. And you need not imagine she is always in a sombre and tragic mood; not even in her writing; she can be quite light-hearted and playful—"

"Sappho gloomy is bad enough; but Sappho gay must be overwhelming. A coy mastodon—an arch hippopotamus—"

"That's all you know," this intrepid American creature went on. "Yesterday afternoon I was in her cabin. She was showing me a number of pieces, I fancy to prove to me that she was not always grand and fierce; and I came upon a little drinking-song that was so quaint and charming I could not help copying it out—"

"A drinking-song—by Sappho?"

"Oh, I could show it to you if I chose," she proceeded, with the greatest coolness imaginable; "but I will do nothing of the kind. I know the prejudice with which it would be received. But it's good enough for *me*. I am not a slave to literary superstitions. I think this little piece of Sappho's is as fine as any of the Elizabethan lyrics; it is certainly more musical than any of Shakespeare's and far more natural than any of Ben Jonson's. You needn't stare—the truth is the truth whether you like it or not—"

"But if it is so wonderful as you say, you might let us see it," Mrs. Threepenny-bit suggested.

"No."

"Come, now, Peggy!"

"No."

She was resolute. But so was her friend, and pertinacious; and at length, after a great deal of coaxing, Sappho's drinking-song was produced. Here it is—Sappho in her lighter vein—

*What is an air but you must sing to't?*
*What is this life that you should cling to't?*
*Life is a day,*
*Life is a play,*
*Your heavy heart is folly.*

*What is this love but to make madness?*
*What is this love but to make sadness?*
*Love is a day,*
*Love is a play,*
*But drinking is most jolly.*

The paper was handed round. And then a kind of dejection fell upon us—and the waiter was asked to bring the bill.

When we eventually returned to the *Orotania*, we found that the Major had preceded us.

"Ah," said he to Lady Cameron, "you did not think we had been engaged in a noble kind of sport, coming through these Mediterranean seas? But we have, though—nothing less than spinning for shark! It never occurred to me that the odometer* must look remarkably like a phantom-minnow; that is what I call fishing—a rope a hundred yards long, and a phantom-minnow as thick as your wrist—"

"But did we get a bite?" said Peggy, eagerly—here was a tale to be told at Inverfask.

"You come and judge for yourself," said the Major.

So he got hold of a quartermaster to conduct us, and we all went along to a kind of storehouse for ship's gear, in which we found the odometer and its long coil of line.

"What do you call those?" he said, holding up the instrument, and showing us two white, ivory-like objects sticking in the wood. "A bite? These are two of the beast's teeth! I wonder what he thought he had struck when his jaws snapped together on this unholy fish."

"Oh, really!" said she, examining the embedded fangs with a good deal of curiosity. "Well, one is not expected to weep tears of sentiment over a disappointed shark, even if it goes away with a bad toothache. And what are you going to do with these things?"

The Major extricated them from the wood.

"I am commissioned by the second officer," he said, with a most polite bow, "to present them to you. You can have them made into a brooch, as a souvenir of the voyage; and there will always be the story to tell."

The young grass-widow was very much pleased, and, to tell the truth, she blushed just as the Baby might have done. For why had she, from amongst all the ladies on board, been singled out to receive this ingenuous compliment? But we had noticed all along that Peggy was a great favorite of those sailor-boys.

Altogether this had been a busily-occupied and not uninteresting

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* The odometer is a piece of wood over a foot in length, tapered, and grooved with metal so that it revolves in the water according to the vessel's rate of speed. It is let out astern at the end of a long line; and the number of revolutions is recorded on a dial fixed to the taffrail.

day; but as evening drew near it was apparent that a vague feeling of apprehension was again asserting itself in our small circle, as if this one or that were beginning anew to ask questions of the future. At dinner Hitrovo came to our table—taking the place good-naturedly vacated by Emily Rosslyn. He seemed neither up nor down about his going away. Probably he would not even have referred to it, if it had not been mentioned; he appeared to regard it as a matter of no moment, as a quite casual thing that might have happened to any one. On the other hand, there was no such indifference about Wolfenberg. He was for the most part silent; and grave and reserved beyond his wont; and again and again he regarded the younger man with an earnest contemplation, as if he were trying to read his true character behind his features and manner and talk. Mrs. Dumaresq, also, was silent; and kept glancing from one to the other as if she were dimly afraid of some impending catastrophe: that, however, was nothing new.

But it was Amélie herself, as usual, who was the dominating presence. And she seemed determined to show that for her this was no sentimental occasion; that she was not inclined to play a part in the familiar comedy of two languishing lovers about to be separated. Self-assertive, merry, wayward, downright of speech, she laughed, and talked, and challenged contradiction; striking here and there with her ruthless iconoclasm; pronouncing on all kinds of subjects, from the Conversion of the Jews—'the only conversion a Jew cares a cent about,' she said, 'is the conversion of Government Bonds'—to the national debt: 'isn't it an extraordinary thing,' she said, 'that a man is not ashamed to let his country be in a condition that he himself, if he were in that condition, would regard as simply disgraceful? Why, you English are at this moment hopelessly bankrupt, the whole lot of you, and yet each one of you walks about quite proudly as if you did not owe any man a farthing.' We observed that she did not say anything about the Russian National Debt; perhaps that was an oversight.

Of course she had sooner or later to make some reference to Hitrovo's leaving.

"Paul," she said (for now she addressed him by his Christian name quite openly) "do you know what is proposed?—a race between you and us as to which shall get first to Tilbury."

He looked at her—as if for information; and then withdrew his eyes: he did not seem to be interested.

"When does this ship sail?" she demanded of the table generally.

"Midnight."

"Why so late?"

"Because it is so nominated in the bond."

"It is absurd!" she exclaimed, impatiently. "Why not set out now?—or at nine, or ten?" She turned to Hitrovo. "It is no matter. We shall have a good start; so you must make haste with your railway journeys if you wish to win. What do you think? Shall you be there before us?"

"Quite possible," he said.

"Your steamer sails for Marseilles to-morrow morning?—and then?"

"Then I have to go to Nice," he made answer, simply enough.

"But you will be at Marseilles before we reach Gibraltar," she said. "You must send me a telegram to Gibraltar."

"If you like it, yes," he responded—he seemed to be indifferent, yet willing to please her in a way.

Later on that night a small group of people had collected at the top of the accommodation-ladder. There was quite a picturesque scene around; for all the great world of darkness was alive with points of fire. High up on the unseen rock the terraced houses were illuminated; the heavens overhead were clear, and besides the palely trembling stars there were one or two lambent planets; far away at the mouth of the harbor, twin crimson rays streamed through the dusk; and in the wide harbor itself the various golden points told of the riding-lights of invisible ships. At the foot of the ladder there was a rowing-boat—a lamp hung astern. Then Hitrovo appeared; and Amélie, and Mrs. Dumaresq. He had no luggage with him: that had been sent ashore during the day.

There was some hand-shaking and bidding of good-bye; but everybody seemed to understand that it was Amélie Dumaresq who was really to wish him farewell. And in her way of doing there certainly was no kind of agonized tenderness—whatever may have been the nature of their adieux elsewhere. She was at the gangway. As he went down the steps, she called out quite gayly, "Take care you don't fall in!" And again, when he had taken his place—when the two oars had struck deep flashes of silver into the water—*and as the boat* glided away, with the yellow lamp send-

ing quivering reflections down on the oily black surface—again she called to him '*Da svidania!*' An answer came out of the dark; the wavering golden star disappeared in towards the shore; and the little knot of people began to disperse.

Amélie (brushing away a tear from her eyelashes) turned to Wolfenberg, and said cheerfully,

"The race has begun then, Ernest. And we shall have a good start, after all, if we sail at midnight."

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## CHAPTER XXII

### UNDER THE ROCK

At sea. Latitude ——? Longitude ——? And is it the rosy flush of the dawn that still lingers in the Baby's peachen cheeks?

She comes quickly forward; and at once it is evident that the tall and Junoesque maiden has allowed her ordinary calm of demeanor to be entirely lost and swallowed up in a pretty confusion of shyness, and embarrassment, and urgent and humble entreaty.

"I am so glad to find you alone!" she says. "For I want to ask a great favor of you—a very, very great favor—and I do hope you will say yes—and you have been so kind all the way through—so kind and discreet—Julian was saying so only last night—

"Yes, but—"

"The letters have come," she goes on, rather breathlessly—"the letters from Julian's relatives in London—and you cannot tell how pleased I am—they are all so considerate—Julian's sister in particular—I'm sure you could not have expected her to write to me quite affectionately—"

"I should certainly have expected it, if she knew you."

"But she doesn't!—and isn't it so good of her!" says this young creature, who seems to be of a warmly grateful disposition. "Well, I want you to take these letters—I know what a favor it is I am asking—please don't think I don't know—and if you would be so very, very kind as to show them to my sister—and—and tell her—the whole story—

"Goodness gracious, why don't you go straight to her and tell *her yourself*!"

"TAKE CARE YOU DON'T FALL IN."

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"Because—because I am afraid," she says—and the great, soft, timid eyes plead more effectually than any words. "She might begin to ask questions—she might be angry. But she couldn't be angry with you. And I know she will do what you tell her; she will take your advice; she will be good-natured if you ask her to be good-natured. Then if you show her the letters, she will see that Julian's relatives are quite content—"

"And well they might be content!"

"Oh, there is my sister just come up. Now will you be so kind! —will you tell her the whole story—and ask her to be good-natured—"

"Very well. Give me the precious letters. The prayers of this congregation are requested for a young damsel in deep dismay."

Yet it was not till much later on—till nearly noon, in fact—that one had an opportunity of engaging Lady Cameron in a little private confabulation. And when this subject was cautiously approached, Peggy abruptly broke in—

"Yes. I know. My eyes have not been shut. I have noticed Julian Verrinder hanging around. But all the same I have been loath to warn Emily; I don't like to put such ideas into her head; and she is so inexperienced—so unlike other girls—her mind is set on such very different things—that I don't think it would ever occur to her that a young man meant flirtation, or love-making, or any nonsense of that kind. And then it will be all over very soon. In little more than a week we shall be in England; after that it is highly improbable that Mr. Verrinder will ever set eyes on her again."

"On the contrary, it is highly probable. These two are engaged to be married."

"What do you say! Engaged? Since when?"

"For some considerable time back."

"Some considerable time?—it is impossible!—it is impossible!" she exclaimed, with staring eyes.

"If you must know the whole story, then, they have been engaged all the way through this voyage. They were practically so when they joined the ship at Palermo; of course that was why Julian Verrinder made his appearance at the same moment—"

"And Emily—all this time—oh, the wretch—oh, the wicked young wretch!" cried Peggy, with eyes still further aghast. "Playing the meek Saint, and carrying on these underhand pranks all

the same. And what has been the meaning of this secrecy? Have these two been deliberately making a fool of us—"

"No, no, they are only timid young things—at least, your sister has been rather afraid of what you might say; and they thought you wouldn't mind so much if they could show you that this step had the approval of Julian Verrinder's family. To be such guileless innocents, they seem to have had a little touch of wisdom, too. The Baby's photograph was taken in Constantinople; copies sent home—no doubt Verrinder knew that her soft eyes would plead for her; and now here are the letters in answer—received at Malta yesterday—"

"And all this has been going on," said Peggy, apparently going back and back over those long weeks, "and that deceitful young wretch of a girl imposing on us all—the solemn eyes—the maiden bashfulness—and stolen interviews, I'll be bound, whenever our back was turned! It is the most shameful thing I ever heard of—"

"But look how excellently it has all turned out. What objection can you have? He is of good family; he has a fair fortune; he is his own master; he is clever enough, as young men go; he is modest; he is over head and ears in love—and I rather suspect the Baby is so too; his friends are ready to welcome her. What more? How can there be any objection?"

"We can't have everybody," said Peggy, rather snappishly, "coming over from the United States and marrying and settling in England."

"Everybody? Now consider this, and learn wisdom. When you get to London, and begin to overhaul your trunks, you will, no doubt, come upon the dust-cloak you wore on driving from Moudanieh to Broussa. If you shake it out, most likely a few particles will fall to the ground; so that a portion of the soil of Asia Minor will have been transferred to Great Britain. But that won't alter the earth's axis."

"Where is that young impostor and hypocrite?" said Peggy, abruptly rising. "I will go to her at once. She ought to be smacked!"

And away she went. But the interview, wheresoever it took place, could not have been a wrathful one; for when we all assembled at lunch, the Baby—though she was mostly silent—*looked* so happily and humbly and hopelessly grateful that her

companions no doubt began to consider themselves quite superior persons in that they allowed her to exist.

A little after midday we passed the solitary island of Pantellaria; and perhaps we envied the criminals permitted to pass year after year in that perfect climate, amid these shining blue seas. On the other hand, those volcanic islands occasionally perform the vanishing trick—disappearing whence they came; perhaps, indeed, that was the fond hope in the paternal mind of the Italian Government when Pantellaria was chosen to form a convict settlement. Then, towards evening, we drew near the African coast; and there was a dusky flare of sunset over the Gulf of Tunis. Twilight fell; and the steady red ray of Cape Bon shone remotely through the dusk.

At dinner this evening we had a startling piece of intelligence conveyed to us—that is to say, a piece of intelligence that might have been regarded as startling in the light of certain wild conjectures and suspicions. All day long Amélie Dumaresq had kept pretty much to herself; reading in odd corners, or standing idly by the rail, and apparently disinclined for society or talk; it was a new thing to see her thus bereft of her usual whirlwindish activity and gay self-assertion. And perhaps it was to cheer her up a little that, as she took her place at table, Mrs. Threepennybit said to her, in a kindly fashion,

"Mr. Hitrovo must be well on his way to Marseilles now."

"I presume so," answered the young lady, with something of affected composure.

"It is strange how quickly one is missed," the elder woman went on, trying to say something that would please. "And in the case of Mr. Hitrovo, you might have thought his absence would not have been noticed particularly; for he kept very much in the background; he did not put himself forward in any way. Yet there has been a distinct difference all day to-day; the ship has not been quite itself."

"I suppose they are wretched boats that run between Malta and Marseilles—I think I heard somebody say so," she remarked —as if the fact of Hitrovo's absence from the *Orotania* was a matter of very little import.

But it was at this point that Mrs. Dumaresq startled us—though no one dared to say a word.

"*What was that,* Amélie?" said the mother. "Do you mean

the kind of people who travel by those boats? I'm sure I shall be glad to hear that Mr. Hitrovo has arrived safely in Vienna. It is such a risk—it is so imprudent—to be travelling about with all those diamonds in one's possession—"

"Diamonds?" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, inquiringly.

"Yes; Amélie's diamonds. He is taking them to Vienna to get them reset for her."

For a second or so a most unaccountable silence prevailed; and somehow we knew that this poor woman was anxiously scanning our faces, looking from one to the other, eager to catch the least little bit of tell-tale expression. The death-like stillness, brief as it was, proved most embarrassing: it was Mrs. Threepenny-bit who boldly threw herself into the breach.

"Oh, yes, yes," she said, desperately. "I remember Amélie telling me that she was dissatisfied with the setting. For my own part I rather like the old-fashioned settings; but when you have so many diamonds, perhaps it is better to have some uniform design. And of course Mr. Hitrovo is interested—he has a personal interest—in having them as handsome as possible; I dare say Amélie will wear them quite as much to please him as to please herself—"

And so she blundered on. But the anxious mother seemed somewhat relieved: it had in a way been demonstrated that the only imprudence that could occur to any one, or be mentioned, was the imprudence of carrying valuable jewellery about the country in any circumstances whatever. And meanwhile Mrs. Threepenny-bit continued her incoherent talk, to cover the general constraint. She pointed out that, once the diamonds were in the artist's hands, there would be no further peril. Was he likely to send a sketch of the design to be approved. Perhaps Mr. Hitrovo would bring that on with him from Vienna? And so forth. During all this, Amélie had sat proud and cold and seemingly indifferent. She had not spoken a word.

Nor, indeed, when our small coterie subsequently withdrew to their accustomed after-dinner retreat, did any one seem inclined to reopen the subject. It was too dangerous. No one would confess to the sudden and hidden alarm that had followed Mrs. Dumaresq's announcement. Because, after all, was it not too absurd to suppose that Hitrovo—whatever else might be thought *of him*—could be guilty of the base and brutal act of absconding

with a packet of jewels? To take human motives at their lowest, was he likely to throw away his chance of winning a rich and beautiful and fascinating heiress for the sake of the immediate gain of a handful of crescents and pendants? And what had the young man done, or said, or shown himself, that we should gratuitously assume him to be a common thief?

But there were other aspects of this peculiar situation.

"Missis," said Peggy, at last, "she has given him those diamonds out of bravado. It is a piece of defiance on her part."

"Why should you think so?" said the other—averting her eyes.

"It seems clear enough. She may have guessed or suspected that Hitrovo had not made himself much of a favorite in certain quarters—had not established friendly and intimate relations, as Mr. Wolfenberg has done, for example; and it is not unlikely, too, that she had grown impatient of her mother's nervous timidity. Then here is her answer. This is a proof of her trust. She says: 'You may suspect or dislike, if you choose; but I know this man; and this is how I show it.' Indeed, my idea of her is that she is so proud as to be capable of flinging her diamonds into the sea rather than confessing she had the least shadow of a doubt."

"Yes, but, after all, Peggy," said her companion (fishing for frankness, but exhibiting none), "I do not understand why you should regard such a thing as a test of her faith in him. It probably never occurred to her. She is severely logical. She knows that when a woman has intrusted her whole life's happiness to a man, the question of the safety or non-safety of a case of jewellery is a very trivial matter. Where is there any bravado in that? where is there any challenge? It was quite natural she should give the diamonds into his care, if he said he knew a jeweller in Vienna who could properly re-set them. That is a small thing—when a woman has once given herself to a man. Trusting herself to him, she might very well trust the custody of her jewel-case. I dare say it never occurred to her that there could be any risk. Indeed it is impossible to think there could be any risk!"

Then Peggy spoke up.

"And if it is impossible to think it, why did you seem so startled when Mrs. Dumaresq told you; and why were you so breathless *in continuing* the conversation, so as to hide your alarm?

Come, now, Missis! I don't say you were alone in what you thought—or feared. And perhaps it was very mad and wicked of us—and very unreasoning—that any such suggestion should have flashed into our minds; but still—still—it was an unexpected announcement; and Hitrovo was always more or less of a stranger and enigma to us; and—and all that Amélie Dumaresq can know of him she must have learned within the last month and a half; and it does seem rather bold that she should intrust him with four or five thousand pounds' worth of jewellery—so bold that, as I say, it looks like defiance."

"She has intrusted him with more than that, Peggy, whatever comes of it," said the other woman, gravely. "She has intrusted him with her life. And after all," she continued, with something more of cheerfulness, "you have got to consider that you can learn a good deal about any human being in a month and a half on board ship. That is what Wolfenberg always says. He relies on Amélie's accurate perceptions, her strong judgment, her determination to know the truth of things. She is not likely to be blinded by sentiment or romance. And if a little bit of bravado did enter into her handing over those diamonds to Hitrovo, well, you know there is pretty often a touch of the *poseuse* about her; she likes doing things for effect; and Mrs. Dumaresq had clearly been commissioned to make that announcement at the dinner-table."

When Wolfenberg turned up, a little later on, he was enthusiastic about the singular brilliancy of the night—the great overarching vault, throbbing with its millions and millions of stars, seeming all the more vast and luminous because of the black solidity of the sea. But it soon appeared that he, also, had been thinking over that incident of the diamonds; for he said, in a casual kind of way,

"I wonder if Amélie really imagines that the Viennese jewellers are the best in Europe? But she never stops to ask advice; she is so impetuous and wilful; the whim of the moment is enough. I doubt if she would take the trouble to give Hitrovo any instructions; though it is a serious matter—the formation of a family heirloom, as it were; and of course she ought to have had designs submitted to her. He is going to telegraph to Gibraltar; if he sends his address she might telegraph back and *suggest* to him to have some drawings made—don't you think so?"

Mrs. Threepenny-bit did not seem inclined to interfere: it was all very well for him, as an artist, to advise. Then he said,

"I should not myself like to be tumbling about from steamer-wharves to railway-stations with five thousand pounds' worth of jewellery under my care. Too much responsibility. I should like to have it deposited with my bankers as soon as possible, or handed over to the jewellers, which would be the same thing, of course. Amélie has always been foolhardy about those diamonds of hers. They are too valuable to be carried about and used as a toy. And yet she has shown some philosophy about it too. Life has always been the great thing with her—the actual enjoyment of living; and its accessories, big or little, she has regarded as being of very minor importance. Let her bask in sunlight, and breathe sweet air, and rejoice in the animation and gayety of the society of friends around her—that is enough: the loss of money or diamonds could never affect her. Once, indeed," he went on, more absently, "one object did enter into her life that for a while seemed almost as important as life itself. Her devotion to art—her resolute ambition—had complete possession of her. And yet that all seems to have vanished. No doubt there is something else, of equal value and importance, perhaps of greater value and importance, in its place.

He spoke a good deal about Amélie this evening; but with no kind of confession that the disappearance of Hitrovo with her case of jewels had caused him the least disquietude. Nor did the two women-folk reveal what was in their minds until they were bidding each other good-night. Then said the elder of them,

"Well, Peggy, if what we wickedly, and I hope absurdly thought, the moment Mrs. Dumaresq told us, should come true, there is one fortunate thing about it: the loss of her diamonds will not be too long a price for Amélie Dumaresq to have paid for finding out in time."

"That is so, Missis," responded Peggy; "but let us hope it is only we who have been frightened by the sudden announcement and the peculiar circumstances. And if we should ever see Mrs. Paul Hitrovo at some grand festivity in London, we sha'n't be able to look at those diamonds without remembering—and being a little bit ashamed of our suspicions. Good-night!"

"Good-night, dear!—and a more charitable mind to all of us!"

The next two or three days were devoid of incident, except

that we ran into successive shoals of flying-fish; and it was quite a welcome novelty to watch the long, wavering, uncertain flight of those silvery creatures, with here and there one of them striking the crest of a wave and making a further shoot before final submergence. And then, in due course of time, we came in sight of the dappled hills of Spain—the brown and yellow slopes of the Sierra Nevada; with, nearer at hand, the green vineyards of Almeria. And yet again, and early one morning, we slowed round the great grey Rock, and entered the well-known harbor; and there before us were the old familiar landmarks—the Alameda Gardens, Jumper's Bastion, the Ragged-Staff stairs—all quite home-like, as Mrs. Threepenny-bit declared, with her eyes grown affectionate and kind.

And here were the letters, newspapers, and what not. Wolfenberg seemed a little concerned—in a furtive kind of way—as these were being sorted out.

"If there is a telegram for Miss Dumaresq," he said to the third officer, "I will take it to her."

But apparently there was no telegram for Miss Dumaresq.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked; and then—when the unclaimed portion of the mail had been placed conspicuously on the top of the saloon skylight—he went carefully over every envelope. And just at this point Amélie Dumaresq came along.

"I'm afraid there is no telegram for you, Amélie," said he.

Now she had been going straight up to that displayed correspondence; but the instant she heard those words she turned aside, with a fine air of carelessness.

"I knew it!—isn't he a lazy wretch!" she said to Mrs. Threepenny-bit; and she was laughing, or affecting to laugh. "Unless you are at his elbow, prompting him, he will do nothing; of course he forgot all about the telegram the moment he left this ship—"

"But, Amélie," said Wolfenberg, "you must remember he may have had no chance of sending you a telegram. From Malta to Marseilles is a long voyage; and I dare say the steamers are small and of no great speed; and then I doubt whether there is any direct cable—"

She waved aside all this humble solicitude.

"It is not of the least consequence," she said. And then she went on, with her usual gay audacity, "I suppose you English

people are tremendously proud of this lump of a rock, and the secret galleries and hidden cannon. But what I am anxious to discover is when the regimental band plays in the gardens. My ears seem to be hungering for something new; and your military bands are rather good, aren't they?"

"Missis, will the Black Watch have their pipers with them?" demanded Peggy, suddenly—forgetting she had vowed she would not land at Gib.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, answering them both at once. "But we will call on the ——s, and they will tell us everything; and then, Peggy, you will see what kind of quarters the officers' wives and families have."

"And will you take me with you?" continued Miss Dumaresq, with a quite charming frankness. "Should I be intruding? Mother would rather remain on board. If you don't mind—"

"Oh, by all means you must come with us," the elder woman responded, promptly. "And then we will bring back the ——s with us to lunch; the Scorpions are always glad to get off their Rock for an hour or two, to look at some fresh English faces."

Thus it was that Amélie Dumaresq went ashore with us, making all the time a very brave show of being entirely unchagrined and unconcerned. Nay, she flatly refused to walk as far as the telegraph-office, where we might have asked whether all the telegrams for the *Orotania* had been forwarded. Apparently she was not thinking of her own affairs at all: she professed, on the other hand, the most lively and sympathetic interest in the spectacle presented by our two young lovers, who could now, without fear of animadversion, consort together a little more openly. And a very pretty spectacle it was—as we paid our early calls, and thereafter drove away round to the small village of Catalan, at the back of the Rock; for the Baby was shy and proud, and would have no stranger surmise; while Julian Verrinder, naturally enough, rather wanted to assert his right of possession. Peggy had grown quite placable over this affair; and seemed to regard them with an amused forbearance, as a couple of irresponsible children.

We had to sail at two; so there was no more than time to pick up our friends and carry them on board for lunch. And here also Amélie Dumaresq was at her best and brightest; quite fascinating, these new *acquaintances* with her wit and wilfulness, her malicious

pleasantries, her gay good-humor. Other people were despatching messages ashore; one or two had actually received telegrams; but she had no thought for any such things. Then we had to go on deck to bid our guests adieu; and here she was also, smiling, observant, interested—as the great long boat, with its six rowers, made away in for the land.

"No," said Peggy, some little time thereafter, "she wouldn't acknowledge she cared one farthing whether there was or was not a telegram for her at Gibraltar. She has a splendid courage."

"Peggy," said the smaller woman, "it was very well done. And do you know why it was done with such spirit and effect? She is nerving herself for Tilbury—for whatever may happen."

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### UNDER-CURRENTS

"Poor Sappho!" says our well-beloved Peggy, as we are walking up and down the deck early next morning. "She is in agony. All the peace, and rest, and charm of the voyage have fled, so far as she is concerned. To begin with, she has had to abandon the Requiem for Phaon's ocean-grave; she was so distracted by various emotions that she could not get on; and she tells me she cannot write unless she is possessed by one all-devouring whirlwind of flame. Very well; she has put the Requiem and everything else aside now; and has given herself up entirely—to Revenge!"

"Yes?"

"The Major," continues Peggy—looking discreetly around; but there is no one within hail—"the Major will be a poor, and sick, and sorry man when he finds a portrait of himself in Sappho's novel. Yes, indeed! And that is what is driving her about mad just now—the terrible business of pulling the book to pieces, in order to introduce this new character. Fortunately, it so happens that among all the types of your English fashionable life that she has been lashing and scourging with whips, she had omitted *the military* type; and so now comes in the Major, the hired mer-

cenary, the brainless elderly fop, the butcher of his kind, the paid assassin. I suppose, in saying all these pretty things, she forgot that my husband was a soldier; but she was in such a rage I did not dare to remind her; one did not know what might happen. In fact, the only question she would consider calmly was whether she could properly place a simple Major—a poor, common, plebeian Major—among the noble and splendid circles she describes. Oh, I assure you," Peggy goes on, with garrulous good-nature, "you will find a gorgeous set of creatures in Sappho's book: at the same time I wish she wouldn't so frequently use the word 'vulgar'—it's a little kitchen-maidish."

Here Peggy's hand steals furtively into her pocket.

"Say, now," proceeds this young American person, whose face is all glorified by the light reflected upward from the sea, under the shadow of the stretched canvas overhead—"are you in a good humor this morning? No envy—no spite—no uncharitableness? You would give fair consideration? You would honestly admit merit? No mean jealousy—no impossible standards—"

"What is it you have filched away from her this time? Produce it!"

"To tell you the truth," says Peggy, as she unfolds a small sheet of paper, "when Sappho lends me these things, I don't think it is merely that I should study them in my own cabin. I fancy she is not wholly averse to their being shown to one or two favored persons.

"Well, here is the latest fragment of the Æolian muse:

*Blood, blood, blood, and blood,*
*That the waters will not drown!*
*Wild arms stretched upward from the flood—*
*He shrieked as he went down.*

*White, white, white, and white*
*A wan soul wings the sky;*
*The crawling sea is black with night—*
*Ah, God! that lonesome cry!*

*Lost, lost, lost, and lost!*
*The earth is damp and cold;*
*Two hands upon a bosom crossed;*
*(The were-wolf stalks the wold).*

"Well, what did he do?" one naturally asks.

"He? Who? Can't you understand?" says Peggy, impatiently. "It is a picture. It is a tragedy revealed as if by a flash of lightning. The woman drowns her lover in the flood; and then, overcome with remorse, she sinks to the ground, and dies—"

"Yes, yes; but the were-wolf? What did he do? Did he bite?"

"You don't seem to understand!" says Peggy, angrily. "This is not a story. Have you no imagination? Cannot you realize the scene—the terrible thing that has happened—without asking for more incident?"

"But the were-wolf: he is the gentleman whose presence is unexplained. What did he do when he came along and found her lying on the ground? Did he bite her?"

Peggy snatched away the fragment.

"They talk about the humane influence of letters!" she said. "I believe literature breeds nothing but hatred and malice and detraction. Never mind: I mean to tell her that there is a distinct vein of originality in her poems such as is not to be met with in any other poet, living or dead." And therewith she returned the folded sheet of paper to her pocket; and that opportunely; for now our Orotanians began to appear—to get a draught of sea-air and sunlight before going down to breakfast.

We were now making steadily home for England, following almost the same line by which we had come south about six weeks before. And what strange things had happened to one or two of us in that brief space of time—had happened so gradually and imperceptibly that it was only now we were beginning to realize their full import. For these altered circumstances, with all their change of plan and project, seemed to be impressed on us the more vividly by the fact that in but a few days we should be within sight of English shores.

Wolfenberg came along to us.

"I suppose it must have been about here," he said, "on the outward voyage, that you went below to look at Amélie's drawings. I think you were rather impressed. You spoke of the reception she would get in London, if she exhibited. And now she is going back to London—but not for that."

He was ordinarily so careful in guarding against any expression of regret over recent events that we hardly knew how to take this *speech.*

"Yes, I think the world has lost a great artist," he continued. "Whatever else may happen, that is about one thing sure. Did I ever tell you of a subject I had thought out for Amélie?—a subject better worthy of her powers than the children dancing in New York streets, though she would have made that fine too. But this was more important; it would have taxed her strength; and she would have been equal to it. The incident occurred in the reign of Domitian. Two peasants, who claimed to be of royal origin, were brought before the Emperor, or his representative in Judæa: they were the grandsons of Jude, the brother of Jesus. But it directly appeared that it was no earthly crown they had in their mind; they were looking forward to the immediate coming of the Kingdom of Heaven; and in the meantime they only wished to be allowed to return to their small farms, to till their fields. Can you see what she would have made of such a group?—the bullet-headed Roman, callous and contemptuous, the bystanders inclined to laugh, the two peasants in their common garb—"

Yes, we could see easily enough; and could imagine that in Amélie Dumaresq's treatment of such a subject there would be a harsh, unsparing truth that would be sufficiently strong and effective. But, if it came to that, was there not an artist nearer at hand more capable of dealing with such a theme—more capable of lifting it out of the atmosphere of mere verisimilitude? The curious, and perhaps even compassionate, Roman, she could have tackled well enough; and also she might have brought her brutality of touch to bear on the people grinning at these poor, harmless maniacs; but who could have painted for us, with understanding and sympathy and revelation, the two swarthy and mystic-eyed Syrians, silent, oblivious of both curiosity and ribaldry, and, in spite of their rude goat-skins and battered sandals, 'trailing clouds of glory' with them, the glory of their inheritance, and their faith, and their dreams? That was not for Amélie Dumaresq; that was for another. But this man, now as ever forgetful of himself, was trying to look only with her eyes.

Of a sudden he appeared to recall himself.

"Ah, well, well," he said, "one must not complain. Everything is for the best, if she is going forward to that settlement of her life, that security of happiness, on which she seems to have fixed her whole desire. For that is always the way with Amélie.

Intensity, concentration: one object only must occupy her whole existence, to the exclusion of everything else. And as I have said before 'The world has many artists; she has but the one world.'"

"You put her welfare, her contentment, before everything: you think of nothing but her," said the small creature who was receiving these confidences; but it was in no tone of reproach; rather she was regarding him with evident favor and perhaps even with some touch of admiration.

"There is nothing I would not do for her," he said, simply. "There is no sacrifice I would not make for her. And all the reward I should ask for, and hope for, would be just this: if I were dying I should like her to come and see me—for a minute—I should like her to come to the bedside, and take my hand, and say 'Ernest, you tried to be a good friend to me always.' But that, of course, is a mere piece of sentiment. I dare say Amélie would laugh at it—"

"She would be a most unnatural and ungrateful woman if she did," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, warmly; but at this point the conversation was interrupted; for there was a sudden ringing of a bell; and presently the whole vessel was in commotion with fire-alarm drill. By the time that calm had been restored, Wolfenberg had been carried off by the Dumaresqs, on some behest or other.

But all this while not one word had been uttered about certain dark fears and suspicions. Nay, it was quite the other way. When we had come together again at lunch, it was almost pathetic to observe the cheerful and hopeful fashion in which Wolfenberg, talking to Amélie Dumaresq, would cunningly insinuate that the future had nothing but smiles and certainties for her. Had he forgotten the absence of any telegram at Gibraltar; or did he assume that such a trifle was of no importance? At all events, whatever anxiety there may have been in his mind, he betrayed none: on the contrary, he was now chatting to her, or addressing the table generally, with an air of studied equanimity.

"Plymouth," he said, as he consulted a certain 'Table of Probable Times of Arrival and Departure.' 'Plymouth, 1 P.M., on the 13th. And we have been punctual to the hour all the way through: why not also at Plymouth? So, you see, Amélie, if Mr. Hitrovo chanced to get to London a day or two before us, *there* is no reason why he should not run down and meet us at

Plymouth, and sail up the Channel with us. Wouldn't that be a pleasant surprise for you?"

She glanced towards him with a curious, quick look—of watchfulness and inquiry: then her eyes became inscrutable again.

"It is hardly probable," she said, with something of carelessness. "He would most likely be a couple of days in Nice. Then it is a long railway journey to Vienna—and a longer one still from Vienna to Calais. I should think there wasn't much chance of his appearing at Plymouth."

"Ah, I don't know—I don't know," he said, encouragingly. "When trains have once started, they soon beat steamships—"

"Besides," she added, with a smile, "even if he were in London, I doubt whether he would come away down to Plymouth: he is too lazy. It would not occur to him. He might do it if some one were at his elbow to prompt him; otherwise he would simply wait."

"You will see—you will see," Wolfenberg said to her, in kindly fashion. "I would advise you to borrow a telescope from one of the officers as we are going into Plymouth Sound."

At this she raised her head, and regarded him with wide-staring eyes.

"Oh, do you think I am so anxious, then?" she demanded.

But here the mother interposed.

"Amélie," said she, "you don't give Mr. Hitrovo a very good character for thoughtfulness and promptitude—"

"He has plenty of other good qualities—plenty—"

"At all events, I hope he will give those diamonds to the jeweller the moment he reaches Vienna," the nervous, white-haired woman went on. "I cannot bear the idea of a young man travelling about with such a valuable casket under his care. Why, it is not safe for himself."

Amélie laughed—in rather a forced way.

"I know what will happen," she said. "As likely as not you will find him turning up in London with the diamonds in precisely the same condition as when he took them away, and with not even a design made. He will have forgotten all about them."

Then there was silence: no one seemed to care to pursue the subject.

But it was about this time that we more particularly remarked the singular change that had come over Amélie Dumaresq's man-

ner towards us. In which connection it ought to be said that whatever relationship existed between her and our women-folk had been solely and wholly based on advances made by herself. Though she might have been to them a curious study in human nature, they had not sought to cultivate any obtrusive intimacy; it was rather she who had, in her frank, offhand, downright way, appropriated them, and extorted interest in herself and her doings and her bizarre opinions. But now she seemed to regard them with a certain coldness, not to say defiance—unconscious as they were of having given her any cause of offence. She was no longer bubbling over with happiness, and eager to sweep all her immediate neighbors into the full-flowing current of her present delight and anticipation of the future. We could see the change most easily in her eyes. These beautiful, lustrous, dark orbs had always given us the impression that behind them was an abundant and joyous life that seemed to challenge and demand sympathy, approval, and co-operation; now there was a certain distance, a kind of scanning, in their look. We had done nothing. We had breathed no word, outside our own small circle, in connection with the disappearance of the diamonds; we had uttered no comment on the absence of any telegram at Gib. But she seemed to suspect us somehow. And especially before the women-folk she was inordinately and effusively affectionate towards her mother. It was 'Mimsey' this, and 'Matushka' that, every other sentence, if Mrs. Threepenny-bit and Lady Cameron happened to be looking on. It was altogether an enigmatical situation of affairs; and meanwhile we were slowly steaming northwards towards England—at an equable rate of about ten or a dozen knots an hour.

We could not forget, however, that, slow or fast as our progress might be, we had two young folk with us who did not seem to care. At first sight a steamship might appear to be a poor substitute for Lovers'-land. Lovers'-land ought to be Herrick's land —with primrose glades and cowslip meadows, rustic stiles and apple-orchards, posies, kirtles, shepherds' crooks, and lads and lasses gone a-Maying. Nevertheless, when all is said and done, a ship will serve. There are many nooks and corners about it, furnishing what may be discreetly called 'occasions.' These two young creatures, for example: what hindered them from being up in the early morning, with the quarter-deck all to themselves, *the shining* blue sea all around them, the long pathway of seeth-

ing foam away astern? Then, during the day, there were all kinds of occupations and expeditions together—to feed the captured birds, to play chess in the empty fore-saloon, or in the chief saloon—with the wind-sails in the ports blowing in cool draughts of air—to sit and listen to the musical maidens who, standing by the piano, were busy with 'Here's a health unto her,' or 'Down, down, hey, derry down,' or 'Though seas between us roll, love.' But it was at night they had their chief chance; for the ship's lamps were far apart; there were long spaces of dusk; and you could not make out which were the figures standing by the rail, with the great black sea beyond, and the dome of palpitating stars overhead. Murmured talk—a glance—a touch of the hand—this was sufficient to have 'the golden age—the golden age come back'; and they could do very well without daisied meads, and frisking lambs, and Corinna's ribbons. And it is possible that there may have been a sort of unrecognized conspiracy to leave those two alone. Peggy, it is true, was still a little nettled about having been tricked; but everybody else was benignant. Wolfenberg had worked at his wedding-present until it was worth a good deal more than the £300 which young Verrinder understood—and hoped—he would have to pay for the coveted sketch.

In crossing the Bay of Biscay we ran into a series of hot and enervating mists; and these, as we drew near the mouth of the English Channel, gave way to a dense fog; so that on the first occasion during this long voyage it seemed probable we should fall away from our fixed time.

"You must not be disappointed, Amélie," said Wolfenberg, at dinner, "if Mr. Hitrovo does not meet you at Plymouth. For if he hears that there has been fog in the Bay of Biscay, he must know that the steamer would be indefinitely delayed, and most likely he would not care to go down and wait on chance."

She did not answer.

"It is different as regards Tilbury," he said, with much cheerfulness. "Quite different. For, you see, they will know in London when we reach Plymouth; and Tilbury is twenty-four hours after; I don't suppose the fog in the Channel, assuming that there is any, will hinder us so very much. There is a hotel at Tilbury, I think? You must remember, Amélie, he never undertook to meet you *at Plymouth*: that was only a fancy of mine. The

race was for Tilbury. But what were the stakes?—what was the bet?"

"I don't know—I don't remember," she said, calmly.

She either was indifferent, or successfully affected indifference; but her mother, each time that Hitrovo's name was mentioned, looked quickly up, and glanced from one to the other, in a nervous and apprehensive fashion. And she seemed anxious that we should not be delayed on our way to London.

"I hear that quite a number mean to land at Plymouth to-morrow, and go on to London by rail," said Lady Cameron to our Mrs. Threepenny-bit. "Why is that, now? The saving in time can be very little — as compared with the length of the voyage. Or is it the fogs they are afraid of? It can't be sea-sickness, in a big boat like this; besides, we have all become hardened sailors. And yet I don't know: you English people appear to have a perfectly overwhelming and inexplicable dread of the Channel—"

"Not so inexplicable, Peggy, if you only knew," her friend made answer, with serious eyes. "You don't understand how largely the Channel enters into English life. Consider this, for example. The young Briton, the moment he marries, must needs drag his bride away abroad; and the very first thing they encounter is the Channel. All during the courting-time," continues this profound philosopher, "these two have been showing off the best side of their character to each other: she is ignorant of him; he is ignorant of her. What opens their eyes? The Channel. They get down to Dover; they go on board a small steamer; the jabbling water flings about the cockle-shell anyhow; and of course they become ill—"

"*Nos et mutamur* in illness."

"What's that? And then their true dispositions leak out. If he is selfish, he appears a downright brute; if she is petulant and ill-tempered, she becomes unbearable. If you only knew how many married lives have been ruined by those choppy seas, perhaps you would have a dread of the English Channel too. And Emily there —if she is wise—when the happy time comes—she will know what to avoid—"

The poor Baby! She had been listening, with her great, soft, pathetic eyes deeply interested; and this sudden calling attention to her startled her into self-consciousness, and summoned swift color to her face.

"That is a long way off yet," she said, with a pretty innocence —and not pretending to misunderstand. "And I know Julian will go wherever I ask him to go, so that there need not be any crossing of the Channel."

"That is right," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with kindly approval. "Young people cannot be too careful—especially at first."

In consequence of these fogs we did not reach Plymouth till the following evening; and the tender that came out to take off the shore-going folk, with its yellow lamps glimmering through this vague, dark world of mist, was a spectral kind of thing. Hitrovo was not on board; nor had he sent any letter or telegram.

"Of course not," said Amélie Dumaresq, with a careless bit of a laugh. "He is too lazy for anything."

"Oh, but you must not take it for granted he has had time to reach England," Wolfenberg said to her at once. "Not at all. How can you tell? We may have won in the race from Malta. Why, Amélie," he went on—but with some little hesitation—and he regarded her the while—"even if you should not find him at Tilbury to-morrow—well—you ought not to be disappointed—"

"Disappointed?" she said, with a kind of merriment. "Do you imagine I do not understand Monsieur Paul by this time?"

Then the people who had been our shipmates for so long began to go down the gangway to the tender—shadowy phantoms they seemed descending into that grey gulf; and presently there were farewell messages being called backwards and forwards. It was a ghostly leave-taking—in this encircling gloom. Finally the smaller vessel, with its dim lights growing dimmer, crept away into the fog and disappeared; and many and strange (as we afterwards heard) were the adventures it encountered before it carried its living freight securely to land; but these do not concern us here.

We lay anchored in Plymouth harbor that night on account of the fog; had a pleasant run up Channel next day; and on the following morning found ourselves approaching the estuary of the Thames. And it needed but a single glance out of a port to convince us that we had indeed reached old England; for here were wild squalls of rain flying hither and thither, and gusts of wind that hurried onwards the lowering clouds, and a

wide expanse of lapping, muddy-yellow water; and far-extending flat shores stretching away beneath grey, and cold, and cheerless skies. The poor Orotanians began to get out their ulsters; and sought refuge from the wet under the awnings that hitherto had sheltered them from the blaze of the sun. And so we crept slowly along the channels, gradually leaving behind us the Girdler, and the Mouse, and the Nore, until, about mid-day, we came in sight of Tilbury Docks and the small pier fronting the river.

It was Wolfenberg who betrayed most concern, despite of his strenuous efforts to appear quite calm and confident and assured. He would continue talking about indifferent matters; but ever and anon his eyes would be stealthily and earnestly directed towards that distant platform and the tender lying alongside. And even we bystanders began to be in sympathy with his eager desire. We hoped that Hitrovo would be there; and that all would go well and happily. For we had not spent this time in close conjunction with such a nature as that of Amélie Dumaresq without having become profoundly interested; and we could not but conjecture how her proud and passionate spirit would brook an open mark of neglect. We, also, strained our eyes towards the pier and the small steamer; and even employed field-glasses—when no one was looking; until, indeed, the loud command issued from the bridge, 'Let go the anchor!'—and a roar of iron chain forward told us that the good ship *Orotania* had brought us all safely home again.

The tender came out. There were two or three gentlemen on board—no doubt friends of the passengers. But by this time suspicion had deepened into certainty: Paul Hitrovo was neither on the pier nor yet on the small steamer now approaching. Whatever might be the reason, he had failed to keep his appointment.

"The fogs have made everything so uncertain," Wolfenberg said to her, with anxious solicitude. "He may not have heard of our arrival at Plymouth. Or he may be waiting for you at Fenchurch Street—"

"Oh, don't bother about it, Ernest," she said, briefly. "No doubt there will be a letter or telegram waiting for us at Glimmer's."

She was pale, but perhaps not much more so than usual: it was her lips, usually so rich of hue, that showed a lack of color

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—they seemed a little dry and contracted. She was proud, and calm, and self-possessed; she maintained an absolute silence; and she regarded, in a cold, impassive, mechanical way, the various preparations for our getting ashore.

Thereafter we had our own immediate affairs to attend to, so we lost sight of those three; nor did we even go up to town with them in the same railway-carriage. But at Fenchurch Street we ran against them once more; and Wolfenberg promised to come round and see us in the evening; there was a silent understanding that he might have news. It was about nine o'clock when he called. He appeared to be in a jaunty and off-hand mood—different from his ordinarily grave and simple ways.

"So you are getting settled down?" he said to our women-folk. "The roar of London sounds strange after the quiet and solitude of those blue seas, does it not? And yet I must be off again on my travels to-morrow; at least, I fear so; to Paris, that is—yes, to Paris; to finish up some business matters. I hope you will all go round to Glimmer's and see Amélie and her mother; they are not very familiar with London. And if you will be so very kind, I am sure you won't find it difficult to interest and amuse them: pictures and music are what they care for most."

No one said anything about what was present to all minds; but as he was going away—and when one of us had gone down into the hall with him—his manner entirely changed.

"What was the name of the hotel in Vienna," he asked hurriedly, and in a low voice so that those others should not hear, "that Hitrovo said he had rooms in—overlooking the river—he spoke of the view—"

"The Hotel Métropole."

"I am off for Vienna to-morrow," he said, "if there is neither letter nor telegram in the morning. There has been no message from him of any kind. Only, the Dumaresqs must not suspect where I have gone. Say that it is Paris—I have a lot of pictures there I must bring over. And will you go and see Amélie as often as you can?—if you ladies will be so kind, I am sure she would be most grateful—she will be lonely at first in this great city."

Her—her, ever and always. He seemed to have no other thought.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### COMINGS AND GOINGS

The next few days were quite uneventful; that was the tragic part of it. Every hour that went by seemed to increase Mrs. Dumaresq's alarm and terror; and all the more so that she durst not speak. Then came a morning on which Amélie, taking her maid with her, had gone out on some errand; and the poor mother, seizing her opportunity, stole hurriedly along to us.

"What can it mean—what can it mean!" she cried in piteous accents; and the tired, pathetic eyes were full of trouble. "Not a word or a sign from him! He must know that we are in England—that we are in London; he must have seen the arrival of the *Orotania* announced in the newspapers. What can be the reason of it! He cannot have been murdered—we should have heard of it—"

"Surely," said our Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "Amélie herself could find out. Why does she not telegraph to him?—no doubt she has his address—"

"Amélie?" repeated the other, shaking her head sadly: it was clear she had already contemplated this course. "You do not know her! Where her pride is concerned, she is like a rock. You might go down on your knees to her, and she would not move. She pretends that nothing has happened. She goes about her daily life as if nothing had happened. This morning she is away to her dentist. This afternoon her dressmaker is coming. She would kill herself, or let herself be killed, twenty times over, rather than have her pride humbled; it is a passion with her; she has been like that since her childhood. Any other girl, apparently forsaken in this way, would throw herself on her bed and cry for hours; but Amélie—Amélie is like stone."

Then she broke into another strain:

"And to think of Wolfenberg's deserting us at such a time!" *she said,* bitterly. "He has always professed to be Amélie's most

intimate friend; and she has just idolized him, and declared to every one that he was the best, the most generous, the most thoughtful, the kindest-hearted of men. Yes; and he goes away over to Paris, to look after pictures, when he must have known that this silence on the part of Hitrovo meant something dreadful—"

"I am certain of this," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with unusual warmth, "that if Mr. Wolfenberg thought he could be of service to either you or Amélie, by being here at this moment, well then, it is here at this moment he would be. That I am certain of!"

She took no heed of this indignant defence.

"Those diamonds—those diamonds!" she went on, driven at last to confession by despair. "That is the terrible thing: you can't help remembering that he took the diamonds with him—that we have heard nothing about either them or him. Not that I value the diamonds a pin-point—no—you won't suspect me of that—when it is Amélie's happiness I am thinking of: it is not the diamonds, but the man's character that is at stake—the character of the man she loves, the man she has given her life to. And you," she said, lifting her troubled eyes with a glance half of anxious scrutiny and half of appeal, "whatever appearances may say, don't you think it is perfectly impossible and incredible that he could have taken those diamonds—don't you think it is a perfectly monstrous suggestion—though it may come back and back into your mind?"

The small woman thus addressed was a trifle disconcerted.

"Well," she said, "we had hardly the opportunities of judging of Mr. Hitrovo that you had; but still, we saw him from day to day, and we talked with him occasionally, and so on; and certainly he was about the last man in the world whom you would have suspected of being a common swindler."

"Besides," observed a bystander, who had gone to the fire for warmth, "if he had been a common swindler, he would have played his cards to better purpose. If he had been a swindler, it was not the diamonds alone that would have satisfied him."

"You both think so? Oh, I am so glad!" she exclaimed. And then she instantly checked herself—though she was not much of an actress. "Of course," she said, with some affectation of unconcern, "I was merely considering the idea that might occur to *an outsider*. To us who know Mr. Hitrovo, and were with

him all that time, such an idea is, as you say, perfectly incredible. Perfectly absurd, indeed." She hesitated for a moment. "And yet his silence is strange."

She rose to go.

"Amélie will be writing to you this afternoon; she has some proposal to make," she said; and then she added timidly: "And you need not tell her I called this morning." Therewith she left —perhaps cheered up a little by this avowal of her hidden and recurrent fears.

But among all the visitors we had at this time—who were increasing in number by the fact that Peggy and her sister were staying with us for a while, before going home to Inverfask—none were more welcome than Julian Verrinder's relatives. They came curious to see what Pearl, what Rose, what Treasure the boy had brought home with him from the far East (to be strictly accurate, the Baby was born in Kentucky, which is somewhat westerly) and they remained to be charmed. Our women-folk could show them other souvenirs of our voyage—Bithynian silks, Turkish embroideries, Rhodian plates, and what not, until it looked as if a sale of bric-à-brac were going forward; but it was the Juno-eyed young maid, with her modest, and grateful, and shyly affectionate ways, that entirely engrossed their attention. And now we discovered why it was that Miss Emily, out of her slender store of pocket-money, had been purchasing various things in the different bazaars and shops—a silver-figured bath-room dress at Broussa, a brass coffee-service at Constantinople, a number of lace handkerchiefs at Malta, and the like. These were no personal acquisitions, to be selfishly hoarded. Not at all. This was for Julian's sister; that was for Julian's mother; we perceived that the Baby had her wits about her, under her prevailing mask of gentleness. And of course there was an immense amount of chatter, at lunch or dinner, about the *Orotania*, and her excellent qualities; until there seemed to spring up a universal desire to go and repeat this voyage, with perhaps some deviation in the direction of Mycenæ, or Damascus, or Smyrna, or Tunis.

"It was simply delightful all the way through," said Peggy, at one of these small gatherings. "And the wonderful thing was that the people turned out to be so nice! Who minded the dear old Major's growlings—though they did sound rather awful at *times*—or grudged Sappho her fondling of the pug, that so mys-

teriously disappeared? Why, out of all those strangers, there were only one or two whom we disliked; and of course they did not know they were disliked. Isn't that a merciful and beautiful provision of nature? I suppose there is no man or woman born who can imagine the reason why he or she should be disliked: they may discover that they are disliked, but they themselves cannot understand why it should be so—therefore the other people are in the wrong. There was only one thing wanting," she continued. "And that will never be found on a ship until one of our American millionaires starts it on his yacht. There ought to have been stables and horses on board, and a tanned ride made somewhere under cover, so that in wet weather we could have had a gallop round and round—"

"But we never had any wet weather!" the Baby protested; and this simple statement of fact dismissed the wild scheme.

There was an engagement-ring bought about this time: rubies and diamonds: very pretty it was. Then the blushing wearer of that pledge and symbol must needs come secretly to the humble chronicler of these occurrences.

"I wish you would tell me what I ought to get for Julian," she said, shyly.

"Why not ask himself what he would like?"

"Oh, no, no!—I could not do that! It must be a surprise. And I mean something similar to this ring—"

"Something to secure him to you forever and ever?"

The tell-tale eyes could look grateful enough when they chose.

"There are two ways of doing that. The one way is to get a thick band of gold clasped on to the arm above the elbow; and there it is locked, and you keep the key; he becomes your bondsman and slave forevermore. But that is not a good way. For one thing, it would make him too conspicuous in a Turkish bath. Besides, he could go to a goldsmith's and get the loan of a file. There is a far safer and surer way—"

"Yes?" she says, eagerly.

"It is to determine, resolutely to determine, that you will never, never sulk. Sulking is the fatal thing in married life; the wounds it inflicts never heal."

She seems a little disappointed.

"I meant something more tangible—something he could wear—*something* quiet and neat, that he would not be ashamed of."

she goes on, with a pretty hesitation. "And yet not quite so expensive as this ring—I could not afford that—though Peggy has been so good to me—"

"And what you are thinking of is a plain, simple, flat gold hoop for the finger, with *Ali* or *Mizpah* on it, in blue enamel; very well; and when you have that already fixed in your mind why don't you say so at once?"

"Then will you come with me to help me to choose it?"

"When you have got the size."

"Oh, of course." Then a pause of reflection. "And there will be no secret and no surprise, after all!—if I have to ask him to let me measure his finger. In that case, perhaps—perhaps it would be just as well if Julian went with me to the shop."

"It would be the very best arrangement possible." And therewithal the Baby, looking immensely pleased, stole away to her own room—no doubt to hold serious consultation with the contents of her money-bag.

The letter we had been promised from Amélie Dumaresq did not arrive; she herself came in its stead; about one o'clock on the following day. And whatever may have been the true object of this visit, outwardly she was in quite a merry mood—the merriment being of a rather hard and forced cast. Moreover, she was as impetuous and obstinate and wilful as ever: nothing would do but that we should come away, there and then, to have luncheon with her mother and herself at Glimmer's Hotel.

"You say you never go out to lunch: therefore you can have no engagement," she went on, in her blunt and downright fashion. "Then Lady Cameron and her sister having gone to the Crystal Palace—why, it is an opportunity: I really must insist on your taking a little holiday. You have no idea how dull it is for poor Mimsey and me, with that wicked Ernest hiding himself in Paris, and not even sending us a line. Come, now! I told Mimsey I should fetch you both: I cannot go back without you. It is quite a gay morning—for London; the walk will do you good."

Now in the case of busy people, going out to lunch simply means the destruction of the day; nevertheless, certain promises had been made to Wolfenberg; so at length we yielded, and *went*. And as we walked along to Glimmer's Hotel, this young *lady* seemed determined to convince us that she was in excellent

spirits, light of heart and careless in mind. It is true that when we reached the hotel, and when she had in a way handed us over to her mother, she subsided somewhat; and a worn and absent look came into her face that we had not noticed there before. At times she would sink into periods of sombre silence; and then again, abruptly recalling herself, would break in upon the conversation with some petulant and laughing remark. Of course no word was said of Paul Hitrovo; there was even a careful, not to say painful, avoidance of all topics that might lead in that direction. But these were two American ladies, not very familiar with London and London sights; so there was plenty to talk about—apart from dangerous things.

Of a sudden Amélie said,

"Now do you perfectly understand that I cannot allow you to go back home? Oh, no, not at all! Your day is lost. Besides, I can guess what would happen to you. You would be inundated with Orotanians all the afternoon. Instead of that we must go somewhere—we four—by ourselves—" She rose from the table, and went and got a newspaper. After the briefest survey, she continued: "Here is the very thing: a concert at St. James's Hall at three, and ——, the wonderful violinist. That will just do."

The next time the waiter came into the room, she had a memorandum ready; and a commissionnaire was despatched to secure stalls. What did it matter?—the day *was* lost. But if we had known what was going to happen at St. James's Hall that afternoon, not all the violin-playing in the world would have dragged us thither.

We were in good time; the house was not overcrowded; we found our seats easily. And then Amélie, having thus as it were provided for the entertainment of her mother and her guests, appeared to withdraw within herself, relapsing into a profound reverie. She listened to the music, it is true, in a mechanical kind of way; but she hardly seemed to hear. And naturally there was no need of conversation now—nor, indeed, any tolerance of it.

Then, in the most startling way, her attention was aroused; it was as if some sudden blow had awakened her; she raised her head quickly; there was a bewilderment of pain in her eyes. Yet *what was this?* Merely that a lady had come forward to the

front of the platform, with a roll of music in her hand; while the bushy-haired gentleman at the piano had begun the prelude to her song. But these notes?—surely we had heard them elsewhere, in far other circumstances? We glanced at the programme—which none of us had thought of examining beforehand: then we knew: it was Tschaikowsky's 'Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt.'

"Mother—let me get past!—I must go out!—I cannot remain here," said this girl with the pallid face and the distraught eyes: she seemed to be trembling with a kind of terror.

"Amélie!"—and there was a hand put on her arm. "You must not! Sit still!"

For indeed this Russian love-song had begun; and she dared not challenge the attention of the audience. Apparently she was trying hard not to listen; she held on through the cruel ordeal, panting breathlessly; she twisted her programme as if it were a rope of steel. But the instant that the long-thundering applause announced that the song was over she rose; we made way for her, and went out into the corridor; and thither she came—pale, and quivering like a leaf; and yet, with a wonderful bravery, striving to be firm.

"I am not very well," she said, in choking accents, "I must go back to the hotel—"

"Amélie, the carriage won't be here for an hour!" cried the frightened mother.

"But a cab—cannot we get a cab!" she said, in a sort of despair, as if she were wholly overcome and ready to sink to the ground.

There was no difficulty about that; and presently we were in a four-wheeled vehicle, returning to Glimmer's Hotel. But hardly had we set out than the girl seemed to give way altogether. The unnatural proud calm of these last few days and the forced gayety of the morning had alike fled from her; the sound of the Russian song had recalled the magic nights on the Mediterranean —and revealed her worse than widowed state; and now, careless of who might see or hear, she abandoned herself to a very passion and prostration of grief, and covered her face with her hands, and rocked her body, and wept aloud.

"Amélie!—my darling!" the terrified mother cried—and she *tried to* seize her hands.

"MOTHER, LET ME GET PAST! I MUST GO OUT!"

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But she took no heed of her or of any one: the tempest had broken.

"Oh, I know—I know," she exclaimed incoherently and recklessly through her sobs. "Do you think I do not understand—why he remains away! It—it is a fine training we—American girls get—freedom and independence—but—but it is not valued on this side. Here—here it is rudeness—insolence—why should he not go away from it! He—he expected to find the Parisian demoiselle—the ball-room débutante—who hardly lifts her eyes—and hardly dares to speak—and is taken back to her governess after the dance—and—and instead of that he found presumption—boldness—impudence. And—and how could he regard it—but with contempt—and scorn—and what could he do but go away? Go away—yes—when you scorn any one—that is the natural thing to do—"

"Amélie," said the third of the three women, seeing that the mother was too panic-stricken to be of any use. "I am sure you are entirely mistaken. No one could be so foolish as to think that ordinary frankness was rudeness."

The girl seemed to try to pull herself together. After a minute or two of inarticulate sobbing, she said—while her hands fell wearily to her side—"I am so sorry you came away from the concert. Will you not go back? Mother and I can walk on to Glimmer's—"

"Certainly not," was the prompt answer.

"I have not been very well," she pleaded. "We have been seeing too many sights—and the fatigue—"

"That is it," said Mrs. Dumaresq, eagerly. "I was sure she was doing too much; and when she breaks down, when she has one of these hysterical attacks, you must not heed a single word she says—not a single word. And there's no one can quiet Amélie, and make her mistress of herself, like Ernest Wolfenberg: I do so wish he would come back from Paris."

With this we arrived at Glimmer's; and when the wan-faced and haggard-eyed creature had been seen to her own room, we returned to the cab and drove home—pondering.

But there were still further and rapid surprises in store for us. Next morning, at the unusual hour of noon, a visitor was announced; and when one went down, it was to discover that Mrs. Threepenny-bit had already received and was now talking with—*Ernest Wolfenberg*.

"Here is news indeed!" she said, most blithely and cheerfully. "Mr. Hitrovo is in London!—came over with Mr. Wolfenberg last night—or rather this morning; they are at the same hotel; and in the afternoon they are going round to call on the Dumaresqs. I am so glad!—poor Amélie could not understand his silence at all; and now everything will be explained; and she will be as happy as the day is long."

Somehow Wolfenberg did not seem to share these radiant anticipations; his thoughtful face appeared a little concerned and anxious; and yet he laughed as he said—

"How well Amélie understands him! She declared that he would bring back those diamonds in precisely the same condition as when he took them away; and that is just how she will find them this afternoon."

"Oh, he has brought them back untouched?" said the small woman, quickly.

"Quite," he answered her. And then he added, with a certain carelessness: "I really think she might as well have them reset in London. She would have better opportunities of overlooking and altering the designs."

Presently Mrs. Threepenny-bit rose and left the room, to carry these cheerful tidings to Peggy; and hardly had the door been shut when Wolfenberg's expression of face underwent a sudden and even startling change.

"Hitrovo had pawned those diamonds!" he said, in a low voice.

"What? Why did you not have him arrested, then?"

"No, no; it was nothing like that," he said, earnestly and hurriedly. "You don't understand. That is the wrong view. There is no criminality or vice about the young man, I am certain; nothing but carelessness and selfishness—and these are not uncommon. Remember his surroundings; the world of sport is his world; debts of honor the first debts to be paid. That's what he went to Nice for; and these diamonds—they were the property of his future wife — they offered him a ready way of settling up; he borrowed a certain sum on them; and then went on to Vienna, to see about redeeming them. Why, if he had meant stealing the diamonds, he would have taken them on to Vienna with him, and got ever so much more for them! It was an indiscreet transaction, no doubt; still—still—I dare say he

imagined that Amélie would not have disapproved; probably he took it for granted that, if he had asked her, she would have lent him the diamonds. It was only a temporary expedient; and then he went on to Vienna to see about the means of redeeming them—"

"Had he redeemed them when you found him?" one ventured to ask.

Wolfenberg looked uneasy.

"Well, no," he said, after a moment's hesitation. And then he added: "To tell you the truth, I had to do that."

"How much?"

"Twenty-two hundred pounds. But I had some money in Paris; and I managed to get the rest. Oh, that is nothing—that is nothing. That will be all right as soon as I hear from New York: I have written."

"And how much of all this story are you going to tell Amélie?"

"Ah," said he, with traces of strong emotion in his voice, "there is the terrible part of it—the dreadful responsibility. How can I dare to tell her anything, lest she might take the wrong view? If she were to jump to the conclusion that this man had deliberately deceived her—had made away with her diamonds—had cast her off—why it would kill her: the destruction of her hopes—the outrage to her pride. Do you not see that she cannot be allowed to run the risk of making such a frightful mistake? Yes, for it would be a mistake altogether! He meant none of these things—not deliberately—not deliberately. But he is easily led away; the present moment is everything to him—"

He rose and began to pace up and down the room; he was much agitated.

"I suppose," he said, "there is in every one of us a sneak and coward, if you only yield. One night I was lying awake in Vienna. I seemed to hear a voice; and it said 'Why try to get this money to redeem the diamonds? Why persuade Hitrovo to go back with you to London? Go yourself to London. Tell Amélie that this man has befooled her—pawned her diamonds—forsaken her. Then she will cast away from her all this entanglement; you will take your old place by her side; your art-companionship will be resumed; she and you will be together, with

all your projects to discuss, and the old and affectionate and happy days will return again—the old and fast and frank comradeship that this Russian came in to destroy.' It was a temptation—a temptation that seemed to tear one in pieces. But, you see—you see—I might be a sneak and a coward to any one else: I could not be a sneak and a coward to Amélie."

Tears in his voice?—yes, and perhaps in his eyes, for aught one knew. Then he said—with that firmness that he could assume at times—that was, in fact, never far absent from him, even in his most meditative and absent moods—

"Well, I must take the risk. I must accept the responsibility. I will not tell Amélie—nor yet her mother—of these transactions in Nice and Vienna: the danger of misconstruction, of misapprehension, is too desperate. They are women; they might take an exaggerated view altogether; whereas a man can make allowances for Hitrovo's bringing-up, and his occupations, and perhaps a little tendency to self-indulgence and the ease of the present moment. And now that he has shown himself amenable, and capable of listening to reason and remonstrance — I mean as regards his coming over here, and doing what an honorable man should do—it is fair to imagine that when everything has been satisfactorily settled about the marriage and so forth, all will eventually go well. That will be my justification—as it will be my happiness. But indeed I do not see that I could have acted otherwise. I have tried for the best. And as it was for Amélie's sake, you may suppose I did not spare long and anxious consideration—"

Here the door opened; and he was struck silent.

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## CHAPTER XXV

### THE "DOOMED LOOK"

On one of these afternoons quite a number of our good Orotanians had by chance come together in a certain drawing-room; and their talk was, as usual on such occasions, eagerly reminiscent: a gay babbling that seemed to recall widely diverse scenes —*swift-glancing* blue-black seas and far rose-grey islands—mys-

terious nights on deck, with planets burning in the south—spacious harbors, sweltering sunshine, and encircling hills—the palms and pomegranates, the lizard-haunted ruins, the domes and minarets of the East. In the midst of all this a momentary pause occurred; perhaps it was a mere accident, or perhaps the opening of the door drew attention; at all events the next instant we knew that Mrs. Dumaresq and her daughter were there, followed into the room by Paul Hitrovo, while Mrs. Threepenny-bit was quickly and gladly advancing to bid them welcome. The young lady was no longer broken down, hysterical, trembling-limbed. She came forward with a sort of royal and confident air, as of old; and after a rapid glance of scrutiny directed towards those people, she said,

"Why, this is like getting home to the ship again! One might almost expect to hear the throbbing of the screw and the plash of the waves."

She was looking very well indeed; and she was exquisitely dressed. Her mother, too, seemed pleased and content. Hitrovo remained modestly in the background, until the two ladies had recognized their friends and acquaintances; and then he, also, in his indolent, good-natured way, singled out this one or that for a nod or a more respectful "How do you do?" The entrance of those three had caused a certain undefined constraint—it was difficult to say why. But our beloved Sappho came to our aid.

Sappho, when she was interrupted, had been about to tell us of a remarkable scheme of hers; and now she resumed. It was a project that could only have occurred to a person of powerful imagination and daring genius. She began by telling us of the marvellous, the incredible wealth of Rome at the beginning of the fifth century—the chariots made of solid silver, the innumerable statues faced with plates of gold, and the like. All this incalculable plunder (she said) fell into the hands of Alaric and his Goths when the Sacred City was sacked; and was borne away by them when Alaric, intent on the conquest of Sicily, carried his victorious arms to the South. But Alaric did not conquer Sicily. Scylla and Charybdis played tricks with the van of the expedition; and Alaric himself died prematurely at the little town of Consentia, or Cosenza, under the Calabrian hills. What happened then? His barbarian followers resolved he should have a tomb that the stranger should never rifle; they turned aside the course

of the stream that runs by Cosenza; in the empty channel they dug a mighty sepulchre for him, which was made sumptuous by the splendor and riches that Rome had yielded; then they turned the waters back into their ordinary bed; and the grave of Alaric, packed with the spoils of Rome, has remained hidden until this day.

And now we began to perceive what the divine one meant. There was fire, inspiration, enthusiasm in her eye: only a great mind could have conceived such a heroic undertaking. For what those savage hordes from Scythia could accomplish by means of their rude implements was surely easily possible to the skill of the modern engineer; and what more simple than to divert the current of this small river, to explore its bed in the neighborhood of Cosenza, to discover the secret sepulchre, and bring its invaluable treasures to the light? No mere lust of gold, but the generous ardor of antiquarian research, would govern and stimulate the new Argonauts. We should behold the gems and jewels with which the Mistress of the World adorned herself, at the time when her unbounded luxury and magnificence and display brought down upon her the swarming multitudes from the Elbe and the Danube. And the means?—as clear as daylight! A promise of fifty per cent. of the treasure-trove—a concession from the Italian government—something to secure the good-will of the Corporation of Cosenza—and there remained but to decide which museums should chiefly benefit, and which publisher should have the issuing of the two large octavo volumes.

Now all this was very well; and we were so led away by Sappho's zeal and eloquence that some of us may have been seriously thinking about taking shares in the Neo-Argonautic Company (Limited) when unfortunately an interruption occurred. There was another visitor; and it was the Major. The moment that Sappho caught sight of her enemy, she ceased her harangue; she rose to her feet; caught her muff to her; briefly said good-bye to one or two near her; and then crossed the room to bid farewell to her hostess, who had gone to receive the new-comer. The Major was as debonair as ever. He advanced smiling, bland, rubicund; he shook hands with Mrs. Threepenny-bit; and when Sappho cut him dead—passing him by with an angry majesty, not to say with a half-audible snort of rage and contempt—he *only* stared at her, and observed:

"Dotty old thing!"

What the phrase meant was a puzzle to most of us; but it was an inadvertent remark: it was quite certain he did not mean Sappho to overhear, and probably she did not overhear.

Wolfenberg was not present on this occasion; but he came to dinner in the evening; and listened with a grave attention to what Mrs. Threepenny-bit had to tell him of her visitors of the afternoon.

"Oh, yes, indeed," she went on (knowing what would please him best of all), "I have never seen Amélie look better, or appear to be in livelier spirits. It was quite like old times—when she used to be the life and soul of our corner of the saloon: do you remember that dear, snug, cosy table—with the brilliant lights, and Amélie's eyes flashing with laughter and merriment? You should have seen how proud and glad her mother was today: for once that worn and anxious look seemed to have left her face. Even the Russian," continued this small woman, in her determination to paint a roseate picture, "bestirred himself a little, and was actually complaisant. You know what I have always thought of him, and of his indolent air—as if he expected you to go up to him and entertain him. But this time he really condescended to be amiable; I heard him talking to the Major about the Nice steeple-chases; and he gave us a most interesting description of the etiquette of a Court Ball at Vienna—the Archduchess Maria Theresa and the Emperor—the diplomatic corps—the presentations—all very grand. Oh, yes, it was quite cheerful to see Amélie looking so well, and among such happy surroundings."

He did not answer at the moment. But later on in the evening, when the women-folk had gone upstairs to the drawing-room, he said, in a somewhat sombre fashion—

"I wish I could trust all that about Amélie. But I am not sure. She has been so altered of late—and so strange. I am beginning to think that she suspects there was something wrong about those diamonds."

He was staring into the fire—his eyes full of a deep concern.

"You never can tell," he said, presently. There is nothing she is not capable of, if she is spurred on to it by her pride. Her high spirits of this afternoon: all that may have been bravado, display: she may have been watching each one of you, to dis-

cover what you knew, or surmised. I may be mistaken, of course. I hope I am. The whole situation is so critical that one becomes apprehensive—perhaps unduly alarmed—"

And then again he continued, after some seconds of silence:

"I did not tell you of a most unfortunate accident that happened, when Hitrovo and I went round to Glimmer's on the day of his arrival. I took the diamonds with me. Naturally: they had been in my possession all the way from Nice: it never occurred to me to hand them over to him. Nor would it have mattered, either, but for this unlucky accident—as he and I were going upstairs to the sitting-room, Amélie chanced to be coming down; and we met on the landing. I shall never forget the curious, startled look that came into her eyes when she noticed that I was carrying the casket. You see, it ought to have been in Hitrovo's charge; I had forgotten that. But she said nothing; and in an instant her face was inscrutable; she has a wonderful gift that way, when there is need. And yet, if she suspects that there may have been something wrong—something she dare not ask about—something, too, that she may connect with the absence of any message from Hitrovo when she arrived in London—consider what a terrible position for a girl to be in. If she has even the remotest doubt about the character of the man she has given her life to, think what that must be to her in an enforced silence; she durst not confide in any one; her pride would not allow her to ask—"

Then he seemed to try to shake off these gloomy forebodings.

"No, no," he said, "I exaggerate. Mere morbid alarm. Everything must come out all right—because—because—well, if she did suspect that there was something wrong about the diamonds, and if she guessed that I brought them back from Nice, she would naturally come to me, and I should tell her the whole story, and show her there was nothing in it—nothing, that is, beyond a certain carelessness and indiscretion. That is the worst that could happen; and what is that but a trifle? Only—only, I wish Colonel Dumaresq were here."

"Colonel Dumaresq?"

"Amélie's uncle," he said, with some returning confidence, "Mrs. Dumaresq telegraphed to him to come over when she *thought* I was in Paris; and they appear to be expecting him al-

most hourly. Yes, that will be a great relief. That will be infinitely better. For, of course, I cannot advise about monetary matters; and Hitrovo is inclined to be a little urgent—wanting a definite understanding at once. That is clearly a family affair; an outsider like myself could hardly accept the responsibility of advising Mrs. Dumaresq; my share has been limited to bringing Hitrovo along from Vienna—"

"And in saving him from having a very ugly charge preferred against him—"

"Oh, no; no, no," he interposed, with some anxiety. "As I say, that was a mere piece of thoughtlessness. The careless fellow that he is! But on the other hand, if he shows himself sensible of the value of the prize he has won—if he does his best to make Amélie's life happy—we may well overlook small points."

On this same evening a very pretty ceremony took place. When Wolfenberg went upstairs to the drawing-room he carried with him a parcel he had left in the hall; and, sitting down by a small table on which was a lamp, he proceeded to undo the wrapper.

"This is my sketch of you, Miss Emily; and I want you to tell me how you like the frame," he said.

But it was in the finished drawing, not in the frame, that we all of us were interested; and when the full light of the lamp fell on this portrait of the Baby, it seemed to us that Mr. Julian Verrinder was a very fortunate young man indeed. A portrait, yes; but something other and stranger; it was as if, in some inexplicable fashion, one had encountered this beautiful young creature in the dim and vague regions of the dawn, with some mysterious message in the large, soft eyes, with the solitude of the cliffs around her, and a murmur of lonely seas. It was a phantom, a vision, full of elusive suggestion; and yet an admirable likeness as well; it was as though our actual, substantial, flesh-and-blood young damsel had come breathless and wondering out of the realms of sleep—dreams still hanging around her—the world still unfamiliar. And then, amid the universal praise, Wolfenberg said—

"But I have altered the destination of this bit of a sketch. Mr. Julian expects to have it—indeed, he commissioned it; but I have *altered all that*; I have brought it along for you, Miss Emily, if

you will be so kind as to accept it; it is my little wedding present for you."

The Baby's big eyes were filled with dismay.

"Oh, Mr. Wolfenberg, I cannot—it is too valuable—"

"If you think it has any value at all," said he, cheerfully, "so much the better. For then you must take it and let it become part of your dowry."

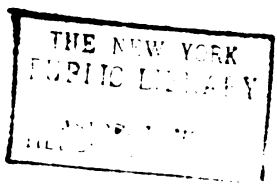
She hesitated, in great embarrassment.

"Em, can't you say 'Thank you?'" Lady Cameron put in, with some touch of reproach.

Thereupon the tall young maiden, grateful, timid, and shy beyond measure, rose and crossed the room. She held out her hand. "Thank you, Mr. Wolfenberg!" she said. And therewith, still retaining his hand for a second, she stooped down and touched his cheek with her lips. It was all done so naturally, spontaneously, and gracefully, that there was no room for laughter or derisive comment. Not in the least. The Baby had proved herself the mistress of the situation. We felt that she had done the right thing, at the right moment, and in the right way. Perhaps Wolfenberg was a little bit abashed. But the Baby modestly and quietly returned to her seat; and we were proud of her; in a trying position she had acquitted herself successfully—and that without art or guile.

However, if this somewhat lonely man seemed to take a curious and sympathetic interest in the fortunes of young Julian Verrinder and his sweetheart (before whom the world lay smiling all so pleasantly) he was at this time abruptly summoned back from that kindly contemplation to face the sterner aspects of life. Colonel Dumaresq came over from Florida. He was a tall, meagre, large-boned man, with a retreating forehead, a heavy jaw, and cold, clear, scrutinizing eyes. Moreover, as we speedily learned, he had a short and summary way of dealing with things; and his opinions were definite. It was after the briefest inquiry, and after an equally brief interview with Paul Hitrovo, that he formulated his conclusions; and although we had nothing to do with these—having no wish to intermeddle in a family imbroglio—he announced them to us all the same. The first was to the effect that his sister-in-law was a fool: in fact, when there were *no* women present, he qualified the noun with an adjective. *Hitrovo* he declared to be an idle, impudent, worthless fortune-

"THANK YOU, MR. WOLFENBERG."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hunter. And he maintained that the only way to cure Amélie Dumaresq of her mad infatuation was to expose ruthlessly before her eyes the true character of the man she had chosen for her husband. There was no kind of doubt or hesitation in the mind of this tall ex-soldier. He was for prompt measures. He said he had come over just in time.

Wolfenberg listened to all this with an ever-increasing alarm. He begged and implored that nothing rash should be done; urged palliations and excuses for Hitrovo—described his position—his upbringing—the necessity of an establishment; and insisted on the improbability of Amélie having been so entirely deceived.

"He may be selfish—and idle—and inconsiderate—yes; but men are not perfect," he went on. "And Amélie has toleration. She is not a romantic school-girl. She may perceive certain defects—without believing him to be nothing but a mere mercenary adventurer. And how can you tell? How can you judge of his character?—"

"How can I tell?" the other repeated. "Well, I go by what a man says to me about himself—when there's no better authority. And if a young fellow—who is none so young either—if he coolly informs you of the price he puts on himself—as consideration for marrying a girl—you can size him up pretty straight. It is frankness on his part, that is; it is a kind of frankness that seems to suggest some one's being kicked out of the house. That is how it presents itself to my mind."

"Colonel Dumaresq, for Amélie's sake, be careful what you do!" Wolfenberg pleaded again, earnestly. "It is the great crisis of her life. You may do irreparable harm. If you quarrel with this young man, he may go away and leave her altogether—"

"Which I think is about the best thing he could do," observed the soldier, calmly.

"What!" Wolfenberg exclaimed, "have you considered what that would mean to a proud and sensitive girl like Amélie?"

"Mr. Wolfenberg," said Colonel Dumaresq, with an odd sort of smile, "you seem very anxious to see Amélie married."

Wolfenberg looked startled—and there was some flush of color in his pale and thoughtful face.

"*And yet she* used to write to me a great deal about you—and

her chivalrous scheme of a life-companionship—working together—and scorning matrimonial ties. I hope it is not because you have abandoned these fine schemes that she has been left to take up with this worthless scamp—"

"Oh, no; oh, I think not," Wolfenberg said, hurriedly. And then added: "Amélie knows that I myself, and my ways of life, and anything and everything I can command—all are at her service, always."

"Yes, I honestly believe that," was the response—uttered in no unkindly fashion. "And I am afraid you have been only too good to her. A little firmer treatment may be wanted to bring her to her senses."

"Take care—take care," was Wolfenberg's final word of warning on this occasion. "It is a beautiful rich life you have to deal with—a life with splendid possibilities—and surely happiness in marriage should be one of these; but a single false step might be fatal. If you were to bring calamity instead of succor, if you were to give sorrow instead of joy, could you ever forgive yourself?"

This was the last we saw of Colonel Dumaresq for a day or two; but through Wolfenberg we heard what was going on. Negotiations for a marriage settlement were supposed to be proceeding; but they were strange negotiations, with Hitrovo, on the one side, remaining obdurate and coldly indifferent, and with Colonel Dumaresq, on the other side, mainly concerned in procuring evidence to convince Amélie of the utterly selfish and venal nature of the man to whom she had linked herself.

"And he is succeeding," Wolfenberg said to us one night. "Do you remember the look on her face when she arrived at Tilbury and found that Hitrovo had failed to keep his appointment? It was a doomed look, as I thought; and she has worn it, more or less, ever since—though she imagines her mask is impenetrable. I am certain that she suspects there was something wrong about the diamonds; perhaps she may even guess that I had some difficulty in persuading Hitrovo to come to London. And yet none the less her courage remains wonderful. Every day the perfectly callous and despicable character of this man is becoming clearer and clearer—yes, I will confess it—it is no use *blinding* one's self to facts—I defend him no more—I make no

more excuses—I have given up all desire to smooth things over; and yet even now she laughs, and talks of a conspiracy on the part of her relatives to drive away her lover because he has the misfortune to be poor. But she sees what he is—and there is despair at her heart."

He sate for a minute or two in profound reverie: then he said, "And to think that this should have come to Amélie—of all the people in the world. Do you remember her as you first saw her?"

Indeed we did: we could recall the gay and imperious creature, splendidly gifted, brimful of laughter, vitality, happiness—the kind of creature to bid the Fates stand aside from her path of enjoyment and triumph. And had we not noticed, also, the successive steps, subtle and stealthy, by which she had been overtaken?—until this was the end: a woman haggard-eyed, with 'a doomed look' on her face—her lover false—her friends not daring to offer sympathy, because of her fierce pride.

And yet we were not prepared for the news that reached us a couple of days thereafter. Our women-folk, happening to be in the neighborhood of Glimmer's Hotel, called on the Dumaresqs; and were shown upstairs. But it was Wolfenberg who came down to the sitting-room; and he seemed agitated.

"There has been an accident," he said, quickly, "—to Amélie; and Mrs. Dumaresq wishes me to explain. Oh, nothing very serious—we hope not—the doctors say it rarely happens that any ill effects remain, if remedies have been applied promptly—and in Amélie's case they were—immediately after the accident—"

He paused for a second, to collect himself.

"You see, Hitrovo left England for good the day before yesterday; and no doubt Amélie was a little upset; and—and she may have thought a little opium would procure sleep for her: then it is so easy to take an over-dose—so simple and ordinary a mistake. But she is all right now—though it was serious at first—they sent for me at three o'clock this morning, at the same time that they sent for the doctor; and for several hours one hardly knew what to fear. But now—oh, yes, she is steadily improving—and there won't be any after-effects, the doctors think—except that she will be a little more careful in the future to guard against such an accident. Mrs.

Dumaresq asks if you would care to go up—and say a word to Amélie—and cheer her—"

But the two callers naturally and properly excused themselves; left many messages; and came away. For a space—as one afterwards heard—they walked in silence. Then said Mrs. Threepennybit to her companion:

"Poor Amélie! You can guess what has happened, Peggy—and the tragic pity of it. For with all her gifts and graces, and her audacity, and nerve, and courage, it has always seemed to me that she was at bottom little else than an impetuous and ungovernable spoilt child; and now, I suppose, the moment she found that life was not altogether what she hoped and wished, she spurned it, and would have thrown it away. And Wolfenberg: he must understand: think what his position must be! I am glad the room was in twilight—I should not have cared to meet his eyes."

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## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE YOUNG BRIDE

Midnight: the house asleep and still: only one room downstairs remaining occupied. There comes a knocking at the outer door—no ringing of the bell, nor yet any loud alarum, but a gentle tapping with the back of the hand. And when one goes along to discover what this can mean, it is Wolfenberg who is found to be without.

"I saw the light; and guessed you were not in bed. May I come in for a few minutes?"

There was something strange about his manner; his face was drawn and pale; his eyes had a sort of blind look in them. And when he entered the room, and sate down, he seemed to be hardly aware of his surroundings.

"I hope you won't mind," he said, in a low voice—a voice that was also curiously impassive. "I have been walking about the streets—until I saw the light—and then I thought I should like to speak to you."

"*Yes:* and how is Amélie?"

"Amélie?" he repeated, as if thinking of some one remote. "Amélie—is well. She is dead."

He spoke coldly and collectedly. One could only stare at this man who appeared to be laboring under some kind of paralysis—as though he had been deprived of perception and feeling by some overwhelming blow.

"Two hours ago," he said. "Two hours ago she went away: leaving the world—what it has become. What it has become—what it holds now—with her gone out of it: I cannot face that yet. For two hours—" he shivered slightly as he spoke; though the night was not cold—"For these two hours I have been trying to understand; but the difference will come to us gradually, day by day, I suppose. At first—at first there is only darkness and bewilderment. For a while I stayed with her mother—but since then—I have been going through the streets—until I saw the light in your windows—I thought you would not mind if I came in for a few moments."

He spoke quite humbly. He seemed somehow dazed. One could only ask him questions to keep him talking—that promised most relief.

"A little more than two hours ago," he said—and then he paused as if seeking to recall the scene—"she was laughing and chatting—or trying to laugh and chat. That was her wonderful courage—to the very end. She was determined to hide from her mother and her uncle what she had suffered over Hitrovo's going: she would have them believe that the over-dose of opium had been a pure accident: so she went on talking in this way—pretending she was anxious to take up her painting again—speaking, as well as she could speak, of going back to the Atelier Didron. Her fortitude, her pluck, was wonderful—when you knew how she was situated—what she had endured—what she was enduring. There never was a girl as brave as that girl—with a dagger in her heart all the time. Do you know this," said he, looking up with the strangest pitifulness in his eyes, "that she asked for Rubinstein's song, '*Gelb rollt mir zu Füssen*'—I knew why—it was to show she could mention Hitrovo's name without a trace of emotion. And I began to think that such courage, such inflexible courage, might even yet carry her through the years of her life, and sustain her, and patch up some kind of a future for her. But the Fates are merciless—*merciless.*"

He hung his head again.

"Two hours ago," he went on, in slow and sombre tones, as if he were thinking aloud, "and there was still that possibility. Amélie was alive and with us — there was a future — perhaps some little making-up for what she had suffered in the past. And then—she was lying propped up and warm in bed—and we had no thought of any danger—it was about the Atelier Didron she was talking from time to time—and then—then, of a sudden, there was a look of fright in her eyes—she gasped out 'Ernest! Ernest!'—she put her hand quickly to her heart—and sank back on the pillow: it was all over even before her mother could catch her in her arms. I hardly know what happened after. But by and bye I got away. The mother was frantic—I could do nothing. I left the uncle with her. I have been wandering through the empty streets—anywhere. I do not understand it yet—Amélie—away from us. It is to-morrow—to-morrow—that I fear. But Amélie has nothing more to fear now. She never did fear anything."

There was in this stunned and almost apathetic impassivity something more terrible than any outcry of sharp anguish. Then he rose to go—with further and humble apologies for intrusion, as if these were needed. But he was easily persuaded to remain: he appeared to have no volition—to have become a mere wreck of himself, drifting he knew not, and cared not, whither. Presently he took an envelope from his pocket.

"I do not know what your English law demands," he said, in a hopeless kind of way. "This was her last message to me—not to-night—she must have written it last night before—before what her mother still thinks was an accident. I found it waiting on the hall-table when they sent for me at three o'clock this morning, though I did not open it for hours after: we were too much alarmed about Amélie's condition. Perhaps you ought to read it. There are no secrets in it—other than what you know or must have guessed."

In a mechanical sort of fashion he handed over the sheets of paper; and then returned to his seat, allowing his head to sink between his shoulders, his eyes staring blankly before him, apparently without observation. He seemed hardly to know where he was, indeed. The appalling suddenness of the blow had entirely crushed and prostrated him; he had had no time as yet to

collect his faculties; so far as he could think, he was thinking back—the visions of many years before his gaze, ending with that tragic scene he had but so lately quitted. And further than that, onward, he appeared unable to go: he had turned shudderingly from a contemplation of the coming day, and all it might mean.

This was a long letter, written hastily, but not (judging by the ink) consecutively. Perhaps she had been interrupted: perhaps new ideas had occurred to her that she was forced to add. Thus it ran:

"My best, and dearest, and truest of Friends,—I am now bidding you farewell: this is my last message to you. Whether it is a farewell forever, or only 'until the dawn comes,' who can say? You never seemed to care to speak of such matters: I suppose you considered them too high and terrible to be talked about; I could see that you let the conventionalities of ordinary speech go by unquestioned. And perhaps that was the wiser way; if people could realize the mysteries surrounding life, life itself would become impossible; an unimaginative world has got to work. But now that I am face to face with these problems, I have no fear: instead of looking forward, and questioning, I am looking back—to you, Ernest. And if you were here now, I would go down on my knees before you, and stretch up my hands to you, and beg for your forgiveness. Oh, I know what you would say—out of your boundless generosity and self-forgetfulness; but I know also what I have done—I see it more and more clearly, now that I am leaving you. I can see how miserably I have failed—what a traitor I have been—how easily I was led away. A traitor—yes!—for the pledges were given, though they were not always declared. There was to be consolation and companionship; you were to be my more than brother—my twin soul; and long years were to prove that our alliance, in affection, in pursuits, in living our lives together, had only grown more simply natural and more assured. And then— But I cannot write down my own shame. It has brought its own punishment with it—a punishment far more bitter than any one has been allowed to know. Can you believe it, Ernest, that in talking to my uncle he dared to use the word *compromised*—about *me*—*I* was *compromised*—and therefore they were bound to accede to his demands. Oh, the shame of it!—the shame of it! Well, it is of little consequence now; pride must go now; and vanity; and all the old desire of figuring in exhibitions; and every other desire save that of making some reparation to you: that must remain with me to the end, however hopeless it may be. Too late—too late.

"And yet, if there is consciousness after death, I should like to know that you had forgiven me. Some night, if you were to say aloud 'Poor Amélie! her life went all wrong somehow; but she tried to be my friend—before the wreck and ruin came'—then perhaps I should hear. And if there is this possibility, I shall not have long to wait; I know that you never did refuse *me anything. Now* when it is too late my eyes are opened. Good friend,

true friend: I wonder if there ever was in the world a man so self-sacrificing as you, so self-forgetful as you, so unswerving in affection, through many changes. Do you think I have not understood all you have done and were trying to do for me in this later time—about the diamonds—and your bringing him back from Vienna—refusing to believe what you would rather not believe—hoping against hope—working, contriving, making excuses, as long as there remained a single chance? And so it was from the very beginning of our friendship. For me everything; for you nothing; every thought for me—not one turned towards yourself. And what a requital!—more shame and shame heaped upon my head— But it is not you, Ernest, who will point the finger of reproach—ah, not you!—not you! I cannot write more. My uncle will look after mother. If they only knew the agony I have suffered in pretending not to suffer—the agony of this affectation of indifference or cheerfulness, when there was nothing but despair in my heart—they would not ask me to endure it longer—they could not be so inhuman as to ask me to endure it longer. So farewell, Ernest. Good friend, dear friend, good-bye! My last thought is of you.

"Your repentant and heart-broken Amélie."

Just as mechanically as he had handed over these two sheets he received them back again; and then he went to the fire, and put them on the coals, and watched them burn.

"I do not know what your English law demands," he repeated; "but I think I am doing right. I do not suppose there will be any inquiry: the doctor says her death was due to sudden failure of the action of the heart. It is a good phrase. The heart may well cease to act—when it is broken."

And then he came back; and in a more excited, and even half-demented way, he said—

"Can you imagine it—can you imagine it!—to happen to Amélie! You remember her. You saw her for a while. You saw how brilliant she was—how active and eager and resolute—how full of a gay enjoyment of life. You remember how her presence—her strong vitality—was felt, without an atom of assertion on her part: it was the fascination of one who was so abounding in gifts, whose future interested and attracted, because of its splendid possibilities. And now—think of her: in that room. But it is the old, old story. This one and that, here and there, seems marked out. The Fates are remorseless—remorseless. The overtaking steps may be slow or swift, but they are sure. Yet why should she have been singled out?—why not some castaway like myself?—if there were such a thing as sub*stitution*, that would have been a joy to me—the welcomest fate

*AND THEN HE WENT TO THE FIRE, AND PUT THEM ON THE COALS, AND WATCHED THEM BURN.*

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that ever man met. If only Amélie could have been left, with something like happiness. But it was too late for that, I suppose. Her life was all broken. There was an end to the possibilities of the future. And now—now she is at peace."

And then again he returned to his seat; and went on talking of bygone days—seeing in pictures, as it were, and always with her as the central figure. The half-hours went by. He did not notice that in the thinner portions of the festooned blinds the yellow glow of the lamps was being encountered and checked by the grey light without.

"Why do you ask of my plans?" he said, incidentally, amid this rambling and half-distraught soliloquy. "What do I care? But forgetfulness is a desirable thing. Perhaps it is of all things the most desirable. What greater good is there than health?—and that means forgetfulness. When your body is in perfect working order, you forget that you have a body; when your brain is sound and well, you are not conscious of any process of thinking. It is only pain that attracts attention to this or that limb, to this or that function. And if I aimed at forgetfulness—at forgetfulness of bygone grief—I know where I should seek it: I should seek it in looking at the big, wide things of the world—the ocean, the sky, the distant coast-lines. These are the soothing things; they seem to say that forgetfulness will come soon enough to all of us."

The light in the windows grew—so that the lamps were paler. But he did not heed. Presently he said—

"I have heard you speak of your greater project. And there is a kind of fascination in the idea of sailing round the world, with glimpses of the land only at long intervals. Lady Cameron said she was sure she could induce her husband to go. And that beautiful young creature, her sister—she will be a bride then: to see her and her young husband together—to be merely a spectator of the happiness shining in those soft eyes of hers—that ought to be something. You will have a pleasant party—light-hearted—merry: you would not care—of course—you would not care—to have tacked on to you—a kill-joy—a castaway—one of fortune's un-favorites—"

Was it necessary to assure him how he would be welcomed—and with what discretion of silence—by that small company of intending voyagers?

"The big elemental things of the world," he continued, in an absent way, "bring peace: the sea—the sky—the distant shores. And I do not think you need fear much; I should try not to be a kill-joy; one would not bring sorrows and griefs to scatter in the pathway of a young bride. Oh, no, no, no; Mrs. Julian—she will be Mrs. Julian then—need not be afraid. It is laughter and smiles that should accompany a young bride; and I should—I should try to remember that—if I were allowed to go with you—"

Of a sudden his eyes were attracted to the windows: they were white now: the new day was here. And for a second he seemed to shrink away in dread—as if the world outside were filled with terrible things, that had once again to be encountered. But this man had courage, too. His eyes might be wistful and given to dreams: the lines of his mouth told of a sufficient firmness should the occasion demand. He rose; made some needless and needlessly humble apologies; and proceeded to take his leave. When the door was opened the empty world without was filled with light—a light not more wan and pallid than the face that now confronted it. Then he disappeared; and the grey pavements were silent once more.

And thus it was (so strangely intertwisted are the strands of human existence—the shimmering gold of anticipation and desire; the blackness of bereavement and despair; the tragic loneliness and sorrows of age; youth's rose-hued hopes and eager ambitions—so strangely complex is the warp and woof of that surrounding mystery to which men have given the name of life, but of which they know so little). Thus it was that a few months thereafter a sufficiently vivacious and light-hearted set of folk once again stood upon the decks of a great steamer, as she was about to set out, by long ocean-stages, to girdle the world. Here was our beloved Peggy, serene, radiant, good-humored; rather regretting that she had not the Major to fetch and carry for her; but perhaps content to do without Sappho and her unnumbered agonies and woes. Here, also, was Cameron of Inverfask, grumbling a little that he should be dragged away to hot climates again, when he had been looking forward to throwing a "Childers" or a "Thunder-and-lightning" over the dark, oily, tea-brown pools, amid the silver gleams and purple glooms of the *wild March* weather, under the hanging birch-woods, where the

black-cock sends forth his challenge from among the withered and russet bracken, and the thrush, in the quiet of the evening, sings loud and clear from his solitary bough. Here, also, was Julian Verrinder, out of his mind with pride over his most recent and most rare and precious acquisition; but nevertheless professing the ways and customs of an experienced husband by keeping away from his wife and almost ostentatiously leaving her to other people. And here was the tall, shy young thing herself—none the less bashful because of all her blushing honors—so grateful for any notice taken of her—so desperately anxious to make a friendly impression with her large, pleading eyes. Then there was our Mrs. Threepenny-bit—alert—animated—ubiquitous—swift of direction—petulant—domineering—and just daft with delight over this setting forth. She was quite impatient to have the last of the strangers sent away ashore.

There was another figure here, distinct, though not apart. It was Wolfenberg. His hair had become quite white during these intervening months. But there was nothing of the whiner—nothing of the self-pityer—that most contemptible of all God's creatures—about this man. He could still hold a resolute front; fearing no dint of fortune that might befall; ready to 'take the world for his pillow,' like another. Nay, at this moment, when our women-folk were naturally a little nervous and excited over the setting-out on so long a voyage, he was endeavoring to calm them, to distract their attention, by talking deliberate nonsense to them. Absolute nonsense—grave absurdities—*à propos* of nothing in the whole wide universe; but Peggy had to listen; and so much was gained. She was being assured that of all existing professions, trades, and employments, that of the tailor was the noblest; "because," said he, "man is the only animal born into the world without a proper protection against the climate; and the tailor steps in to provide what Providence forgot." Again she was being reminded how curiously habits survive—how paupers in a workhouse, when they become perfectly desperate, rend their garments just as the Jews of old used to do. And then again—

"Clear away that gangway!" was called from above.

Whereupon Wolfenberg turned to the Baby, who had been listening in her quiet, respectful, modest way; and he made bold to place his hand within her arm.

"Mrs. Julian," he said, "I have a great favor to ask of you. We shall be going down directly to have our places at table arranged. Now, will you let me sit next you? You see, your husband cannot be allowed to monopolize you altogether; he must sit opposite you, where he can look at you as much as he pleases; but if you would let me have the seat next yours—"

"Oh, Mr. Wolfenberg," said the poor Baby, "you wouldn't care to talk to *me!*"

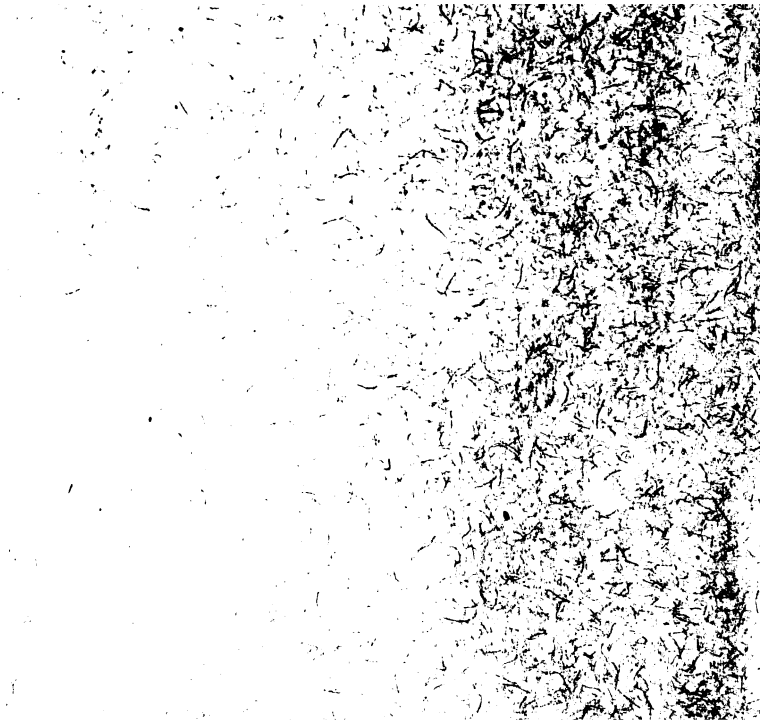
"What's that—what's that?" he said, good-naturedly. "Why, you don't seem to have any idea of your own importance! Don't you know that you are the most important personage on board this ship? Don't you know that a young bride brings luck? And what is more, Mrs. Julian, I'm going to ask you, not only to 'lend me your ears,' but also to lend me your eyes — all through this voyage."

She glanced at him inquiringly.

"Yes, I am going to try to see things as you must see them," he went on; "and then everything will be new and fresh and wonderful. Youth and happiness ought to make a fine pair of rose-colored spectacles; and you must lend me a little of the magic—"

The screw began to revolve; it was a sound that sent a thrill of anticipation through many a heart. He turned again to the beautiful and gentle young creature who stood by his side—and who had made no kind of effort to remove his hand from her arm.

"We are off now," he said to her, cheerfully enough. And then he added, in his grave and kindly fashion, "And where do you think a young bride should be bound for—if not for the Cape of Good Hope?"

THE END

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